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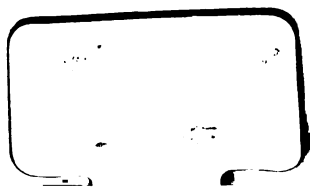
# FATHER FABIAN



E. J. WORBOISE



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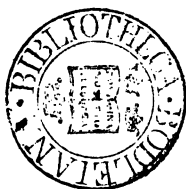
# FATHER FABIAN.

*The Monk of Malham Tover.*

BY

EMMA JANE WORBOISE,

*Author of "Overdale: the Story of a Pervert," "Nobly Born," "Grey and Gold,"  
"The House of Bondage," "Husbands and Wives," &c., &c.*



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# FATHER FABIAN.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A GOODLY HERITAGE.

"Like other babes, at her birth she cried,  
Which made a sensation far and wide—  
Ay, for twenty miles around her.  
For though to the ear it was nothing more  
Than an infant's squall, it was really the roar  
Of a fifty-thousand pounder!  
It shook the next heir,  
In his library chair,  
And made him say 'Confound her!'"

ON a bright spring evening, about thirty years ago, a young man, handsome, well dressed, and especially well mounted, rode slowly down the winding road which leads into quiet Seatondale. He had ridden far that day; but naturally strong and active, and thoroughly inured to long equestrian journeys, he looked nearly as fresh as when he started in the morning, from the distant town of Lunchester. He had taken the perilous course of coming "over-sands," though not without a guide; and the tides were low, and at the neap. He had crossed by the little fishing-hamlet of Cockleham to the ancient town of Chalfont, where he had stayed to bait his horse, and also to dine, for the fresh sea-air had given him a tremendous appetite.

"I think I never was so desperately hungry in my life," said he, as he explained his wants to Mrs. Drewitt, the landlady of a primitive ancient hostelry, called the "Thur-

ston Arms." "I hope you have something good to give me?"

"I can give you, sir, a dish of splendid trout, caught in the stream this morning, such trout as you only get in these parts; the south never saw such fish! I'm sorry to say we have no butcher's meat ready dressed, but there's a fine fowl down at the fire this moment, and it will be ready in half an hour. Then there's eggs and ham, *of course!* Every egg new-laid in my own poultry-yard, and the hams of my own breeding and curing, sir! My own cheeses too, sir, and the very best of home-made bread."

"And if a hungry man cannot dine sumptuously on such right royal fare, he ought to go fasting," laughed the young man, well pleased at the state of the landlady's resources. "Let me have the trout as soon as possible, and the rest to follow. I should like to see that my horse is comfortable; he will want a good feed, poor fellow, he has had a longish tramp across the sands, and up and down those rough, rocky roads of yours."

"If you'll just cross to the stables by that door, sir, you'll find your horse well tended. I won't have either man or beast neglected in my house, and our ostler is to be trusted."

"No doubt; but I always see to the animal myself;" and the young man crossed a wide flagged yard, and, entering by a low arched doorway, found himself in a spacious vaulted chamber, with the remains of a beautifully groined roof. "Is this your stable?" he said to the man, who was busy about his horse. "Why, it would make a handsome dining-hall!"

"It were t' *refectory*, sir, in t'auld times," replied the ostler. "This is wheer the monks did take their meals—such as they was! This inn is part of t'auld Priory, which were debolished in the reign of King Henry VIII. If you care for ruins and such like, I'll ask mistress for t' key of t' chapel. We keep it locked, because 'tis the custom; and there's some auld bits o' carved stone lying about, and the towrists as come this way carries 'em off unknownst."

The traveller said he should like to see the chapel; but he found little therein to satisfy his curiosity. Only portions of the walls remained, and the bases of one or two

large clustered columns. One corner of the nave had been turned into a kitchen-garden for the cultivation of early salads; the north transept was rudely walled up, and a little side chapel did duty as a store-shed for winter peats. But where the altar had been was evident enough, raised, as it was, by three or four steps above the rest of the desecrated sanctuary, and towards it the stranger turned, and reverently bowed the knee. The ostler, who peeped in, intending to volunteer some information respecting dates, &c., changed his mind when he saw the gentleman's attitude, and concluded that he was "saying his prayers."

The chapel, and all that lay about it, were soon explored; three centuries of decay and unscrupulous secularisation had done their work; there was very little of interest remaining, and the young gentleman, scenting most savoury odours from the inn-kitchen, felt that he wanted his dinner, and must defer further investigation till he had satisfied his appetite; and then a rosy, sunburnt damsel appeared, and informed him that the trout were ready for the table. Mrs. Drewitt had not overpraised the fish, for they were excellent, and of a rich, though peculiar, flavour; the fowl, too, was tender and succulent—a real, plump, well-fed, well-cooked, barn-door chucky. The ham appeared in delicate rashers, and the eggs in the shape of sauce; and the mashed potatoes were a marvel of culinary art. The young man felt quite refreshed, and inclined for conversation, when Mrs. Drewitt herself appeared with the cheese, and a cobwebbed bottle of renowned old port.

"I hope, sir, you have enjoyed your dinner?" said the landlady, as she carefully poured the choice wine into a venerable decanter of curious shape. "We don't often have visitors come this way, so early in the year; but we are all the more glad to see them when they do turn up. I'm afraid my bread is a little too stale for you; I don't bake white bread at this season oftener than once a-week."

"Thank you! it is all as good as possible. I never dined better in my life, I assure you. When I rode down into the town so sharp set, I was terribly afraid I might get only bread and cheese, and perhaps fat bacon. You speak of visitors; do you have many in the summer time?"



"A good many that comes and goes, though they don't often stop the night. And yet not so many that might be, for you see we are quite off the regular tourists' track. People often go off to the Lakes, or to Scotland, right away; only a few turn aside to see our grand old Priory church, which they do say is as fine as many a proud cathedral. Maybe you'll like to go over it, sir, before you leave the place? Old Crake the clerk keeps the keys, and he lives hard by."

"It is strangely out of proportion in so small a town, Mrs. Drewitt. The place seemed to be all church as I came down from the high ground yonder."

"Why, you see, sir, it was, so to speak, *all church*, once upon a time. This part of the country, the guide-books do say, was unusually rich in monastic foundations. The Priory of Chalfonts was very famous, and the church is still one of the great show places of the county. The Priory buildings took up nearly all the space that is now the town, though not much is left of them except the gate-tower, which you see there, and what is included in our own premises. The refectory, the place where the monks did eat, has been turned into stables ever since I can remember. We keep the chapel as it is, because folks likes to look at it; there are some who think no end of a few broken arches and mouldering stones, just because they are old. You see, we think nothing of such things here, because we see them every day, and some of us would like a few new decent houses, and a good shop or two, that would bring trade to Chalfonts, far better than all these tumble-down ruins that are no good to anybody."

"Are there any families of the old religion still in the neighbourhood?"

"Of the *old* religion, sir? There's but one religion in these parts; there isn't a Papist, nor yet a Dissenter, to be found for miles round. I heard our parson say so himself; and thank God for that same."

"I meant the Catholic religion; the ancient faith which reared your beautiful old church, and founded this Priory. Are there not any Catholics, or what you would call Roman Catholics or Papists, hereabouts?"

"As I said, sir, not one! It's curious to think how

times are altered, though. Why, once, I suppose, when the monks were flourishing, you know, and when the Priory was in its glory, there were none but Roman Catholics here, or anywhere else. And this must have been a fine roosting-place for them, for there was Bekanks Abbey not many miles away, which, though in ruins, is a grand sight to this day, and was ever so rich and powerful. The Abbot was just like a king, and could put anybody to death without judge or jury if he offended him. Then there was a famous religious house for nuns at St. Ulpha's, and there are some mighty queer tales about the pranks they played with the monks, and the monks with them; and there's a story about an abbess—but, perhaps, sir, you are one of that persuasion?"

"I adhere to the ancient faith, certainly; I have never known any other. I never in my life attended a service in what its votaries call the Reformed Church."

"Excuse me, sir, but how, then, can you know which is right and which is wrong? I'd see both ways, if I may make so bold as to advise you."

"Have you seen both ways? Have you ever attended a Catholic service?"

"Indeed I have. I have been twice to the Catholic chapel at Lunechester, and to a private chapel in Burton-dale, and once, when I was staying all night at St. Ulpha's, I went to what they call *Vespers*, and it was Christmas time, and there was a little doll in a sort of cradle, and a big doll, with a gilt paper crown on its head, sitting by it. It was very pretty, very pretty, indeed! and the singing was sweeter than any I ever heard; but it was too childish for me, and I never cared much about dolls, even when I was a little one. And then, at Ribbleton, the incense made me sick and faint, and I could not find my place in the book they gave me, which it was English on one side, and Latin on the other. But English or Latin, 'twas all one to me, and I don't believe anybody else was much the wiser, for all the people seemed to be praying or saying prayers at least, on their own hooks; and the priests jabbered something in a sort of sing-song, and the organ played, and a little bell tinkled, and the priests went up and down, up and down, till I am sure their poor backs

must have ached ; and one of them was that stout I could see it was no easy matter. No, sir, I could not fancy it ; it seemed too much like child's play. I dare say it had a meaning in it, but I could not find it out. And I've liked my own church better ever since ; and I can't help feeling glad, sir,—if you'll forgive me for saying so,—that that King Henry *did* turn out all the idle monks and nuns and abolish the Mass, or else we might be having it now, which is what I could not put up with ; I'd rather join the Methodies, much as I despise them."

"There is a meaning, a deep meaning, in all the services of our holy Church, Mrs. Drewitt. I wish I could persuade you to look into the matter very seriously. Remember, our religion is as old as Christianity itself, while yours is only an invention of yesterday, and was the work of a few bad, scheming men, who had nothing to lose, except their souls, and everything to gain as far as the things of this world went. And that Henry VIII. was a regular scamp and rascal, as history will tell you."

"I know, sir, I have heard all about that. He was a regular Bluebeard, and cut off his wives' heads one after the other, whenever he fancied a fresh face. But he did a good thing when he turned out the lazy, gormandising monks, and as for the rest, why, God Almighty can make even the worst of sinners an instrument for good. I don't defend that King. I think if ever there was a monster he was one ; but I've heard tell about *Popes* as were worse than he was ; *Popes* that poisoned folks, and did other things, not fit to talk about."

"You must not believe all you hear and read about the *Popes*, Mrs. Drewitt. Their history has been chiefly written by their enemies, their words falsified, and their actions misconstrued."

"Perhaps so, sir. Very likely, for there always were plenty of scandal-mongers in the world, and always will be, I suppose. But I know what I saw, and what I heard, and I never could get over those dolls—though I've no objection to them in their proper place."

"But they were *not* dolls, Mrs. Drewitt."

"Indeed, sir, *but they were*. The small one in the cradle was the very moral of one I bought myself for my little

niece, and her mother, my sister-in-law, at Keirmouth, dressed it like a real baby, and the one in the cradle at the chapel was just the image of it, only it was swaddled up, instead of having proper petticoats on. And to see the poor people kneel down to it! Oh, deary me! I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes."

"Now, Mrs. Drewitt, you are, without knowing it, saying very shocking things! What you call a doll was intended to represent our Lord Jesus Christ in the manger."

"It was a doll, sir, for all that; and the people did bow down to it."

"No! they bowed to Christ Himself, whom the waxen image represented."

"I couldn't say they did not, of course, sir; but it seems very odd, and so very foolish. But I'm sure I beg your pardon, for getting into all this talk about religions; though you are not the first who has come here bewailing the good old times when the Popes governed England, and the monks held their own, and the Mass was in all the churches."

"Don't apologise; it was quite as much my fault as yours, if fault there were. My dinner and my after-dinner talk have been an equal surprise to me. But I must be moving if I mean to see your beautiful old church before I start anew across the hills. One thing, though, I must tell you, Mrs. Drewitt, the time is not so far distant when the Mass will once more be said in your church and in all the churches of the land. A true sacrifice will once more be offered on the altars at which true priests shall minister, and the ancient faith will at last be restored. England will be Catholic again, Mrs. Drewitt, and you will see it if you live to be an old woman."

"Then I hope I shan't, sir, and I do hope you are wrong. Shall I send round to Crake, sir, for the keys? and what time must your horse be ready?"

"In an hour's time. I have a longish ride before me, but I shall do it ere it grows dark, I fancy, and Sultan will be rested, and as fresh as in the morning. But I really do not know how far I have to go, nor yet the precise direction I should take."

"Where might you be going, sir?"

"I am going to Seatondale; it's just over those hills or *fells*, I think, you north-country people call them—is it not?"

"You have to cross those fells, sir, and another and higher range behind them, with a pretty good stretch of upland moorland between; and a beautiful ride it is from the top of Garth Head down into Seatondale, especially on a fine clear evening as this will be, and if your horse is sure-footed, for the roads are bad for travellers, though they do say they are just like pictures. But, pardon me, sir, you are not going to the Hall, I suppose? and yet there is nowhere else to go, for the inn is a poor place for a gentleman."

"It is to the Hall I am going. Why not? Do not General Seaton and his lady receive visitors?"

"Well, sir, Seaton Hall is not a gay place at any time, but just now there are no visitors, nor likely to be any, except, if you'll excuse me, it's the monthly nurse and the doctor, and I saw him ride by on his fastest nag quite early this morning."

"The nurse and the doctor! Then some one is ill?"

"Of course, sir; didn't you know? We have been expecting to hear of it every day for this week past. The nurse, recommended by the Duchess herself, has been at the Hall ever since the beginning of the month. She is quite a fine lady, I hear, and has a maid of her own to wait upon her."

"But I don't understand! and what have you been expecting to hear?"

"Of the arrival of the son and heir, sir, of course!"

"What son and heir?" asked the young man, looking fairly bewildered. In excuse for his seeming stupidity—for he was twenty-two years of age—we must explain that he had been brought up chiefly at St. Omer, and at a celebrated Roman Catholic college in this country, and was quite unfamiliar with those purely domestic events which are continually happening in family circles.

"Why, the *baby*, sir!" returned Mrs. Drewitt, getting out of all patience. "At least, we hope it will be a boy;

but if it's a girl it is not of so much consequence as it might be. For, as perhaps you know, the estate goes in the female line, male issue being wanting."

"The *baby*! Do you mean to tell me there is a child born at Seaton Hall?"

"I hope so, sir, by this time. I shall be right glad to hear that it is well over. I don't wonder you are surprised, for no one imagined the nursery apartments would ever be wanted at Seaton. You see, the General and his lady have been married so many years, and he is quite elderly, and she not to call young; and he has said many and many a time that the desire of his heart—that was, a child and heir of his own—would not be granted to him. And he felt it all the more that the other Seatons to whom the property must go are—what you would call Catholics, sir; but he spoke of them to my good man as bigoted Papists."

"The Seatons have ever been devoted to the interests of the Church, her most faithful sons and daughters,—except this one branch, which relapsed about a hundred and fifty years ago. But never mind that now; I want to know about this baby?"

"There is nothing to know, as yet, sir; and the little thing may not live. It was told us several months back that an heir was expected, and that the General was almost beside himself with joy. And I don't wonder! No man likes to go down childless to the grave, and he naturally disapproves of his estates going where he had rather they should not go. And you know, sir, he had a son by his first wife:—that was thirty years ago, I believe; and the boy died quite an infant. The first wife never came to Seatondale, for she hated the country, and said Fells-hire and Rockshire were only fit for savages. But the present lady is fond of Seatondale, and spends most of her time there. She was as much disappointed as her husband when no little ones came. And to think there should be one, at last! I do hope all will go well, both with her and the babe. They do say there has not been a child born at Seaton Hall these hundred years and more; for the ladies of the house never affected the place, till this Mrs. Seaton came. And the General wanted her to go up to town for

the occasion, but she said—'No; her child—since God was so good as to hear her prayers, and give her one, like another Hannah—should first see the light at her own bonnie Seatondale.'

"Who was this Mrs. Seaton?—do you know?"

"Well, nothing in particular, as far as family goes, I am told, and she had no fortune. It was a pure love-match; the General married his first wife, who was 'my lady' in her own right, to please his father. He married his second to please himself, as he had every right to do, being full forty-five years old, and having distinguished himself in his country's service. I am told the Romish Seatons were very wrath when they heard of the marriage; but as years passed on, and there were no signs of a family, they were more reconciled to it, for the eldest son of the General's next brother would succeed in due time; only, you see, this unexpected little stranger makes all the difference."

"It does, indeed! When a man is childless at sixty-five, or pretty near that, the next heir begins to feel rather confident. Well! I must be going on my way; I'll not trouble the clerk to show me the church now; I dare say I shall have another opportunity. I suppose I can get a bed at the inn you spoke of? I am not difficult to please. I think, perhaps, things being as they are, I had better not go to the Hall to-night."

"Will you stay here, sir? I can promise you a well-aired bed and a good supper, and we shall be sure to hear the news before the morning. A stranger is awkward in a house at such times."

The young man reflected for several moments, then he replied,—“No, thank you; I would rather get to Seatondale to-night. I shall only feel fretted and impatient if I linger. Let me have my bill, please, and tell your man to bring my horse to the door. Or, stay! I will see that he is properly saddled myself. Sultan does not care to have strange hands about him always; and he plays tricks with the girths.”

But when Sultan's master came to examine his feet, thinking of the roads before him, he found a shoe rather loose, and so the blacksmith had to be sent for; and the

afternoon was well on its way when at last the traveller left the "Thurston Arms" behind him.

The landlady stood shading her eyes from the slanting sun, and watching her late guest as far as he could be seen. An hour afterwards, when her husband came home, and had heard all she had to tell, she said to him, "I tell thee what, master, that young man would be the very heir we've heard tell of!—the eldest son of General Seaton's brother, you know. I thought he favoured the General about the forehead and eyebrows; and when I told him of the baby heir that was looked for, he turned quite pale, and seemed as if he had heard bad news."

"And so he had," replied mine host, as he drained his pewter-pot; "so he had, mistress, if what you say is true. But it is queer that if he was the heir, he should know nothing of what was going to happen. And queer, too, that he should know nothing about Seatondale. Well! I've heard say as people never do like their next heirs, if they are not their very own flesh and blood. Nephews are all very well, you know, and so are cousins, as next of kin, but there's nothing like your own lawful son to come after you. So fill the pewter again, wife, and pour out a glass of wine for yourself, and we'll drink to the health and prosperity of General Seaton and his lady, and the little stranger."

"I wish I'd asked his name," said Mrs. Drewitt, "but I feel almost as certain as if I had. He's Mr. Seaton as sure as I'm Betsey Drewitt. Poor young man, it must have been a shock though, and he not looking for anything of the sort. I do think our Seatons ought to have let him know. But to fancy his saying that the Popish religion would be uppermost again before long! that we'd have the Mass again, and I suppose confession, and incense, and dolls, and all that sort of nonsense! I tell ye what, husband, I'm main sorry for the young fellow, who is as nice-spoken and open-handed as you could wish; but I am right glad the Seaton money and all the estates *won't* go to a Romanist! They are doing mischief enough at Ribbleton and at St. Ulpha's, those Papists, who would make us all monks and nuns if they could; we don't want them in Seatondale, that is as good as next door to us."



Meanwhile, young Seaton—for the landlady had not erred as to his patronymic—was riding at rather a sober pace across the fells and the moor which separated the vale of Chalfonts from Seatondale. The light was fading when at last he began to descend the slopes of the rocky Garth Head, that shuts in Seatondale from the rest of the world southwards. Once he paused to listen if the bells were ringing, but he heard only the rush of the mountain torrent and the sighing of the lonely upland breeze. In fact, there were no bells in Seatondale—none nearer than Chalfonts. Seaton church was little better than a barn; and its one cracked bell, though available for funerals, was of no use at all on festive occasions.

“A goodly heritage!” said the young man, as he drew rein, and gazed upon the wild loveliness of Seatondale, as it lay stretched at his feet, for many and many a mile. “And this morning I doubted not that it would be mine;—though I had never seen it, I knew it was fair and wide as it is. And *now*!—It is of no use to think of it! It is not my loss, so much as the loss of Holy Church. What will they say at St. Omer?—and—*what will Father Fabian say?*”

---

## CHAPTER II.

## THE SEATONS OF SEATONDALE.

“ It was an April day ; and blithely all  
 The youth of nature leaped beneath the sun,  
 And promised glorious manhood ; and our hearts  
 Were glad, and round them danced the lightsome blood  
 In healthy merriment ; when tidings came,  
 A child was born—and tidings came again  
 That she who gave it birth was sick to death,  
 So swift trod sorrow on the heels of joy !  
 . . . . . She made a sign  
 To bring her babe. ’Twas brought, and by her placed.  
 She looked upon its face, that neither smiled  
 Nor wept, nor knew who gazed upon ’t, and laid  
 Her hand upon its little breast, and sought  
 For it, with look that seemed to penetrate  
 The heavens, unutterable blessings—such  
 As God to dying parents only granted  
 For infants left behind them in the world.  
 ‘ God keep my child ! ’ we heard her say, and heard  
 No more. The Angel of the Covenant  
 Was come, and, faithful to His promise, stood  
 Prepared to walk with her through death’s dark vale.  
 And now her eyes grew bright, and brighter still—  
 Too bright for ours to look upon, suffused  
 With many tears—and closed without a cloud.  
 They set as sets the morning-star, which goes  
 Not down behind the darkened west, nor hides  
 Obscured among the tempests of the sky,  
 But melts away into the light of heaven.”

SEATON HALL was scarcely what people would call “ a fine old place.” It was old enough, as to its foundations ; but the ancient house of the Seatons, being deserted by its lawful owners, had tumbled down bodily, and in its stead had been erected, in the very earliest years of the eighteenth century, a plain but substantial building, spacious, tolerably convenient, abounding in dark nooks and passages, having a superfluity of staircases, and, on the whole, neither remarkable for grandeur nor for elegance of design. The rooms were, for the most part, dark and dull, the windows were heavy and small-paned—for people had not yet accustomed themselves to a reckless expenditure in the article of plate glass—the ceilings

were low, the chimney-pieces were high, the floors were of solid oak, the principal staircase in *parquet*, and the walls immensely thick. Altogether, we may affirm that Seaton Hall was in the very best style and taste of the first years of the brilliant reign of *Anna Regina*, whose bust, in marble, much defaced, and sadly weather-stained, still adorned a laurel-shaded corner of the fair pleasance.

General Seaton was nearly as old as his nephew declared him to be, for he had not long ago commemorated, according to custom, his birthday, which was publicly spoken of as his sixty-third. Mrs. Seaton was more than twenty years his junior, but as she had been a wife full fifteen years without ever being able to cherish reasonable hopes of maternity, the present event was naturally regarded as something little short of an actual miracle. As the landlady at Chalfonts had said, the General had been married before, in the days of his youth, chiefly in deference to the wishes of his own family and that of his bride, who between them arranged the whole affair. Nevertheless, he made the Lady Sarah an excellent husband, and the pair, without a particle of romance, or a gleam of sentiment between them, were yet as happy as are the average of respectable married persons. Not that they spent a great deal of their time together; in fact, they had little opportunity for growing weary of each other's society, for Lady Sarah was a woman of fashion, and lived very much in public, and the General, who in those days was only Captain Seaton, was ordered abroad with his regiment a few months after his nuptials.

A few more months, and Lady Sarah gave birth to the desired son and heir—a puny, sickly infant, who had so much difficulty in struggling into existence, that he lacked the vital energy necessary to its continuance. It was said that Lady Sarah herself was the person most to blame, for she had injured her own constitution by a prolonged course of fashionable dissipation; nor had the sweet prospects of motherhood at all restrained her. In vain her medical attendants advised at least a temporary retirement. Such a sacrifice was not to be dreamed of! She was seen as usual at Ranelagh, at Vauxhall, at the theatre, at the concert, and everywhere else indeed, whither the

giddy throng resorted. And she gloried in tight lacing, and danced more persistently than ever. Warnings came to her from friends, from detractors, and from her own failing health; but all were alike disregarded, till one day she became seriously ill, and then the doctors were summoned in haste, and her ladyship was "let blood," as they called bleeding at that period, when the inhuman operation was practised alike upon octogenarians and children scarcely out of arms, and when it was held to be the prime specific for a number of maladies, and especially for the distressing symptoms under which Lady Sarah suffered.

"Letting blood," however, did not at all improve her condition, though it afforded temporary relief, and a few weeks afterwards, all in haste and prematurely, the infant heir of the Seatons was born.

"It was a mercy he was taken, poor little fellow," said all the gossips, when he was buried in old Kensington-churchyard; and so it was, for, utterly without stamina, and with a very decided curvature of the spine, his life would have been rather a burden than a blessing.

Lady Sarah never experienced anything like recovery; she had ruined her constitution, and what she did not herself effect, the doctors, by their insane, but then prevalent system, did for her. The practice of phlebotomy, and the administration of potent drugs, and the want of wholesome exercise, only debilitated such patients as were naturally robust, but the weaker invalids succumbed, and without much more ado departed this mortal life, and were gathered to their fathers.

Of this latter class was Lady Sarah Seaton. She lived for nearly two years after her child's birth, yet she never was able, even for a day, to resume her place in society. Without any very decided ailment, she gradually sank, and her husband—he was gazetted Colonel then—obtained leave of absence between the campaigns to come home and see her die. Bereft of wife and child, he felt himself greatly afflicted, and having laid Lady Sarah with all due pomp and solemnity in the family vault at Kensington, he was impatient to return to the seat of war.

When at last peace was proclaimed, and poor convulsed Europe restored to a state of equilibrium, Colonel Seaton

—raised to the rank of General—was still comparatively a young man, though not so young as he might have been had he followed any but a military calling, or had that calling been exercised at any less stormy era of the world's history. He had been so little in love with his late wife, that he could, without violence to his feelings, contemplate a second marriage, an act which he began to regard more and more as a real duty. The Seatondale Seatons and the Southerleigh Seatons were at feud, and yet a Southerleigh Seaton must be the General's heir, if he died a childless man. The estates, once united, had been divided two generations before, when the head of the Seatons had, for certain reasons of his own, embraced the Protestant religion. His wife, however, had adhered to the "ancient faith," and the children were baptized and brought up alternately as members of the Romish and Reformed Churches. Only two—the eldest sons—survived; but these two were earnest upholders of the differing tenets they professed. The younger brother remained always an enthusiastic Romanist; the elder, a staunch Protestant, had the pain of seeing his second son converted, or perverted—the ingenious expression "'verted" was not then invented—by his Popish uncle, and his only daughter persuaded to take the veil in an Italian convent. His heir, however,—the General Seaton of our story—remained firm to the principles of the Reformation, and as eventually he became a much richer man than his father or his grandfather had been, he felt how extremely desirable it was that a son of his own, carefully nurtured in Protestant principles, should succeed to Seatondale, as well as to the large amount of personal property, which he could bequeath entirely as he chose.

As you may imagine, a handsome and comparatively young widower, of good family, unblemished reputation, large possessions, high military rank, had not far to seek when he determined upon a second marriage. Scheming mammas, and mammas who did not scheme, were alike willing to receive him into the family circle; fathers and brothers cultivated his society; plain girls and beauties, heiresses and portionless damsels, blooming *debutantes* in their first season, and world-worn maidens whose bloom

had vanished years ago, were all more or less gracious to General Seaton, and encouraged him to believe that "particular attentions" would be acceptable.

But those particular attentions he did not pay to any unmarried lady. He was verging now on forty, and at that age a man has generally gained so much prudence as to look warily before he leaps. Also, having in his youth missed all the romance of courtship, and all the sweet *glamourie* of mutual love, he resolved, now that he was his own master and free to choose almost where he would, to wed only her whom his heart should elect to be his bride. Whether he was spoiled by too much deference, and so grew fastidious and hypercritical, or whether, disgusted by the court paid to him as a first-class "eligible," he disdained the roses that he was all but importuned to gather for himself, I cannot tell; but certainly, he passed by beauty after beauty, however nobly born and highly bred; he ignored feminine wit and wealth, and paid no regard to the flatteries of those who were supposed to languish for his affection. And so years passed on till prudent mammas and grave chaperons began to call him a "detrimental," and to give him occasionally the cold shoulder, till careful fathers began to warn their daughters against him, and to say confidently that Seaton was "not a marrying man."

They well might think so; for at forty-five he was still a widower and disengaged, and the Southerleigh Seatons began to reckon their chances, and to nourish strong hopes of the succession. It came upon them like a thunder-clap when the General—who had been rusticated all one summer and autumn—suddenly reappeared in May Fair with his second wife. All the gossips, and wiser people than the gossips, were extremely puzzled at this marriage. The bride was scarcely pretty; she was small and insignificant looking, pale, retiring, and some said "awkward." It was soon ascertained that she had not a sixpence of her own, that she was of no particular family, that she was by no means a genius; and it was at last decided that the new Mrs. Seaton was "nothing and nobody." It was a mystery that society never succeeded in unravelling, a problem that remained unsolved when long

afterwards the coffin-lid covered both bride and bridegroom.

And yet there was no mystery at all.

“Why did she love him? Curious fool, be still!  
Is human love the growth of human will?”

So said Byron, who was supposed to be well versed in the natural history of lovers of every degree, and we will not stay now to inquire into the soundness or the fallacy of his opinions. Suffice it to say that General Seaton really, and for the first time in his life, *fell in love*, when he saw and learned to know sweet Mary Damarel! When a man of five-and-forty does fall in love he is not content to play the sentimental lover; he woos in downright earnest, and his ardour is unquenchable. General Seaton, whatever his tactics might be in war, went boldly, almost rashly, to work in his impetuous courtship; believing that “faint heart never won fair lady,” he at once, and with all his colours flying, besieged the citadel, and was rewarded by a speedy and unconditional surrender.

Mary Damarel was simply of respectable family, she was an orphan, and portionless, she had a pleasant face, and a remarkably engaging smile; there was nothing else to recommend her to a stranger, and she was acting as governess in the family of a rich relation, when the General met her and his fate together. Then he discovered that he had an immense, and hitherto undreamed-of capacity for loving, that he was capable of the strongest and most enduring attachment, that into this new-born affection was compressed all the passion and fervour of youth, and all the strength and tenderness of riper years. And Mary, who was twenty-five, and older than her age in feelings and in looks, was quickly won, and as nobody had any right to interfere, they were for a few weeks engaged, and then quietly married; for the General saw no reason why his happiness should be deferred, and Miss Damarel's relations were only too pleased to dispose of her so felicitously.

Never were husband and wife more truly united than William Seaton and Mary Damarel. They were all in all to each other; and when, after a brief trial of London

life and London gaities, the bride yearned for the peace and calm of the country, and for the homely duties which she was longing to fulfil, the General right gladly bore her away to his own ancestral Seatondale, and there, with only a few brief absences, they lived in the enjoyment of almost perfect happiness for fifteen uneventful years.

The one trouble—the sole shadow upon their sunny, calm existence—was, of course, the non-appearance of the ardently-hoped-for heir. They had given up hoping, believing that they had quite resigned themselves to their childless lot, when at last Mrs. Seaton was able to whisper to her husband that what he most desired might soon be granted him. To say that he was delighted, grateful, thankful, would scarcely represent his state of mind; he was fairly in a seventh heaven of rapturous ecstasy. He had nothing more to wish: his life's happiness was crowned. For not only would he be a father—the poor little baby who was buried in Kensington churchyard he had never seen,—not only would his Mary bear him the precious child of his old age, but she would bring into the world the Protestant heir, who would bear Protestant rule at Seatondale when he and she had paid the debt of nature. The General was not an eminently religious man, but now his heart overflowed with gratitude to Him whose gift the promised blessing was; and as for his gentle, faithful wife, he almost worshipped her. The secret he was charged to keep was soon disclosed, for he could not hide his happiness. He would have liked to return public thanks in church, but naturally enough Mrs. Seaton objected to such a demonstration, remarking that it would be quite time enough for that when the child was christened! When Christmas came all the country round, from Lunechester to Penmount, and from St. Bega's Head to Ingleborough, knew why the General and Mrs. Seaton so politely refused all the invitations of their friends, and who was the visitor who was to come with the April buds and flowers to Seaton Hall. And rich and poor sympathised heartily with the expectant parents, for the elderly General and his lady were universally esteemed and loved.

The General's first proposal had been that they should



at once remove to town, in order that the very best medical skill might be secured. But Mary Seaton had set her heart on having her child born in his own ancestral home—the home so inexpressibly dear to her own heart. “Nay, love,” she said to her husband, “I am very strong, and not in the least nervous; you know I have not had a day’s illness since we married, and I don’t believe in so much fuss and cosetting. Besides, these circumstances make all women equal, and what serves your shepherd’s wife might serve our gracious Queen. Please to let me stay at Seaton, William?”

And nothing loth, William consented. The Duchess promised to secure an invaluable nurse, who was to take up her residence at Seaton Hall at an early period; and as the hour of trial drew near, messengers were ready both day and night to fly at express speed to St. Ulpha’s and to Chalfonts, to summon the two medical authorities of the neighbourhood.

More than once Mary said to her husband, “My dear, should not the Southerleigh Seatons know? Ought not some communication to be made to them?”

And the General replied, “No! I shall not trouble myself about the Southerleigh Seatons; we have never held any intercourse, and I happen to know that they made extremely impertinent observations on our marriage. They will get the news with the rest of the world, for I mean to announce the birth of my heir in every newspaper in the kingdom. Besides, Mary, only young Aubrey Seaton is really concerned in the event; the baby puts his nose out of joint, thank God! As for the others, they could only come in after Aubrey—a miserable, monkish, Popish, Jesuitical lot, bound hand and foot in the shackles of Rome, and vowed heart and soul to the Scarlet Woman.”

“I cannot help being a little sorry for young Aubrey,” said Mary, softly. “He is quite a boy, is he not?”

“A mere lad, I believe; but, really, I don’t know; I never saw the fellow. I have not seen his father for I don’t know how many years, not since poor Agnes, influenced by him, became a nun! Faugh! it makes me sick even now; and she was the handsomest girl out that season, and such a horsewoman, and a wit, and a

genius besides. And there she has been shut up these five-and-thirty years, of no use to anybody. Shouldn't I like to lead an assault against that convent, and let all the poor things out into God's own sunshine!"

"But your brother had more children than this Aubrey, had he not?"

"Oh, yes; half a dozen; but only two boys. The eldest, Francis, was to have been a monk, but he was lucky enough to be drowned while swimming in the Tiber. There are three or four—I don't know how many—girls between him and Aubrey, who is the youngest of them all. The girls are all nuns, I believe. One is a poor Clare; another is of the Order of St. Vincent de Paul; and the last I heard of Aubrey he was being educated at St. Omer—that ancient hot-bed of Jesuitism."

And so it came to pass that the Southerleigh Seatons knew nothing of the anticipated event at Seatondale; and it was about this time that Father Fabian, Aubrey's cousin and spiritual adviser, recommended a visit to the Hall. He thought it was high time that the young man should make acquaintance with his heretic uncle, and behold the inheritance which, in a few years, *must* fall to him—for that now, after such a lapse of time, a child should be born at Seatondale was the last thought in the mind of the Romanist Seatons. The succession seemed so secure that already many a plan was devised and many a scheme mooted by Father Fabian and his cousin Francis, Aubrey's father, and his other cousins, who were mostly monks and nuns.

At last came the day that was to make General Seaton a father; a trying day for him, whose anxiety was intense, almost to agony. In his solicitude for his wife he nearly forgot the child whose birth might cost him all too dear; and, as the hours passed on, and the longed-for tidings were delayed, he grew sick and faint with dread and apprehension. At last, late in the afternoon, he heard a step outside the library door, and the next minute entered, without rapping, Mrs. Clifford, the wife of the curate of Seatondale, and Mary's closest friend. She had been with Mrs. Seaton all day; the General himself had brought her to the Hall at six o'clock that morning. He stared

desperately in her face; he dared not—indeed, could not—put the question on which so much depended. She looked grave, and she was an experienced matron; for, after the fashion of poor curates' wives, she had a large little family of her own.

"General!" she said at last, the tears glistening in her kind brown eyes, "I am come to bring you good news, but not, I am afraid, the best news. The child is born, but——"

"What is the matter with him? Tell me the worst!" cried the General.

"The matter is that it is not '*him*'!—that is all. You have a fine, healthy little daughter—quite a show baby, nurse says."

"And Mary? She is of more consequence than all the babies that ever were born."

"I can hardly say; I ran away directly I could bring the news; there is, I hope, no cause for anxiety."

"You hope! are you not *sure*?"

"It is impossible to be quite sure just yet. But I trust—indeed I think—all will go well. Shall I tell her you are not disappointed?"

"*Disappointed?*"

"In the girl heir, I mean. You have looked so confidently for a son."

"Tell her I am perfectly content, abundantly satisfied. When can I see her?"

"Very soon. I will send Dr. Wilson to you."

"Do so, please. I shall wait for him impatiently."

But the General had to wait longer than he expected; the afternoon grew into evening, and the grey dusk began to fall, when, unable to endure the suspense any longer, he left the library in search of intelligence. The house was very still, and the stillness troubled him. Of course a bustle would have been out of the fitness of things; but that dead silence was unnatural—it appalled him. He went upstairs into the broad corridor on which his wife's rooms opened; but there was no sound. Perhaps she was sleeping, and he was turning into a room close at hand, when he heard Dr. Wilson's voice.

"General!" the doctor spoke with bated breath. It is

a bad omen when doctors and nurses speak in that low, muffled tone.

"I am here, doctor; how is my wife?"

"Not so well, I am sorry to say, as we could wish. She is extremely weak. The baby is——"

"Never mind the baby! Five hundred babies would not make it up to me—if—if——. Now doctor, just speak out! I shall go mad if you only *look* the tidings."

How Dr. Wilson managed to make the unhappy husband understand that his idolised wife was passing away to the land of shadows he never afterwards could tell. At first, the General was incredulous, stunned,—such a sequence to his hopes he had scarcely imagined possible. Not till the morning of that day had he at all realised at what cost he *might* become a father! Dr. Wilson was saying drearily, "Mrs. Seaton is not young, and in these cases——" when the General broke in with, "Don't stand there explaining, man! Send for every doctor in the country! What's talent and money for? I'll give £5,000 to the man that will bring her through! Oh, that we were in London!"

"Dear General," said Dr. Wilson gently, "it is not talent that can save life in such a case. Believe me, everything has been done that could be done. The nurse is worth half a dozen ordinary medical men in herself. And Mr. Lowes has had large and varied experiences; but——" He could add no more, for the General was fainting.

In another half-hour he was sufficiently recovered to sit by his wife's bedside, and the first shock over, he could command his feelings. She lay there very white and still, and at her side was the little unconscious creature for whose life she was giving her own.

"You will not love it the less because it is a girl?" she whispered, as the General bent over her.

"Not a whit, darling," he replied; "only—only—if you go away from me——"

"You will love it all the more," she interrupted; "you have not looked at her, William, and she is so pretty!"

But the General only groaned; whatever his child might be to him in time to come, he had no thoughts for her now.

"You will have to be father and mother to our baby both!" she persisted weakly, "and let her be named

Beatrice. It was my mother's name, and it is a Seaton name too, I know."

"She must be *Mary*," said the General, swallowing down his emotion. And then he remembered that he could never bear to call the child *Mary*; he could not endure that another *Mary* should be in *her* place; so he huskily added—"Well, Beatrice, if you like, love! Beatrice will do very well. She shall be called Beatrice *Mary*."

"And, dear! I am not sure that we have been quite kind to that young Aubrey. Perhaps, if you knew him, you could lead him to abjure his errors. I have often thought——"

And here the deadly sinking came over her, and after that she could say but a word or two at a time.

Only once she whispered—"I have been so happy, so happy, my darling; and it is God who calls me now."

Then she signed to him to lay the baby on her arm, and he could see that she prayed for it, and committed it to the world's great Father, though her pale lips scarcely moved, and no faintest utterance was heard.

Late into the night the faint breath fluttered, and the sad, weary watchers kept their solemn vigil. Mr. Clifford came, and knelt by the bed, and said some "Prayers for the Dying;" but she for whom they were said heard them not, for "the Angel of the Covenant was come," and she, already entered into the Valley that we poor, weak, faithless mortals call "dark," was pressing onwards to the light. Ah! the Valley may be dark, perhaps, at this end, but the deeper we go into it, the brighter and brighter it grows, till at last, in the full resplendent glory, the darkness dies and melts away, even as night's shadows vanish in the sunbeams of the day.

And so the night passed, and the spring morning dawned, fair but misty, upon the mountain-tops, though Seatondale lay still in the twilight shadow. But ere the rosy flush grew golden, ere the piping of the half-awakened birds grew into song, while yet the upland mists fell in soft April rain, while yet the morn was dim and sad—

"And chill with early showers,  
Her quiet eyelids closed—she had  
Another morn than ours."

## CHAPTER III.

## THE SEATONDALE FOLK.

“ Far from the madding crowd’s ignoble strife  
Their sober wishes never learned to stray ;  
Along the cool, sequestered vale of life  
They kept the even tenor of their way.”

YOUNG Aubrey Seaton found the humble hostelry in Seatondale a *very* humble one; nevertheless, he managed to make himself tolerably comfortable in the clean, sanded parlour, where his frugal evening meal was served. The Hall was the only house of any pretensions in all the dale, which was sprinkled over with stone cottages, some larger and some smaller, according to the wealth and position of their inhabitants, who varied in rank from small “statesmen”—a corruption of *estatesmen*, signifying landowners—to hinds or labourers of the meanest order. The curate was the only person who came between these simple rustics and the Seatons; and he was only a perpetual curate, Seaton Church being really a chapel-of-ease to the grand mother church at Chalfonts, twelve miles distant. Of course, there was no rectory or parsonage, but there was a large bare grey house standing on the outskirts of the park, in a piece of ground—or “allotment,” as the north country people say—called from time immemorial the “Priests’ Croft,” and devoted to the use of the resident clergyman of the place. The church, as we before observed, was little better than a decently-appointed barn, whitewashed outside and inside, with narrow pews of unpainted deal, a perched-up cock-loft of a gallery for the singers and performers on musical instruments—organ there was none—a font like a mammoth soup-tureen, and sadly out of proportion to the building itself, being big enough to drown a brace of babies at a time, and so most effectually “regenerate” them; an open timber roof, more substantial than ornamental; and long, narrow windows, lattice-paned, with the most miserable and commonest

sort of glass; add to this a funny little belfry, in which swung a single bell of good size, but cracked. and noisy in the matter of crank and pulley. There was a legend extant in the parish—I beg pardon—in “the *chapelry*!” Seatondale was very particular as to the use of this term as applied to their own district, between Garth Head and Greystone Crag; and the legend affirmed that this bell had never been otherwise than cracked, it having been bought—nobody knew when—second-hand, from the churchwardens of a great church in the south, and that might mean anything south of Lunechester, the county town of Luneshire, which London people imagined to be pretty far north. At any rate, the church in the south was burnt to the ground through the overheating of its flues—so ran the story, which was duly reported to strangers, when any came that way; and the bell, one of a fine peal, fell down from the flaming belfry while the chimes were still playing, and so came to grief, and was never more judged worthy of association with its iron-tongued brethren, who were lucky enough not to tumble from their high estate.

This unfortunate bell, somehow relegated to the fastnesses of remote Seatondale, did the best it could, which was not much, nor indeed was much required of it. On Sunday morning, so silent was the place, notwithstanding that the church was open, and the people decently, but quaintly attired, going up to the house of prayer, you might have hastily concluded that

“The sound of the church-going bell,  
These valleys and rocks never heard.”

But you would have been mistaken, for the moment the curate, in his surplice, appeared in front of his own house, which was about fifty paces from the church, the old clerk rushed into the porch, where the bell-rope hung, and began to pull frantically as if to make up for lost time, and do as much “tolling-in” in three minutes as most people essayed to do in a quarter of an hour. The result was a great clanging noise, as if all the fire-irons in the chapelry were being rattled down from the top of Straddle Sear, which reared its hoary head high above the little church about

half a mile away. But still it was an efficient noise, for all the loiterers quickened their pace as soon as they heard the clangour, it being considered a very *great disgrace* to be late in church; which highly proper sentiment, I think, proved the clodhoppers of Seaton to be in advance of many fashionable London congregations, who take it as a matter of course that at least one-third of the worshippers should assemble ten minutes after the service has commenced, and so disturb the devotions of the more punctual church-goers.

"There's t' parson's bell!" would cry some white-coifed dame, and hurry on her lagging progeny, clattering in their wooden-soled shoes. And then they would catch a glimpse of "t' parson" entering the porch, and they had to make more haste than ever; for the curate, already robed, walked straight into the square deal box, which did duty for a reading desk; and the moment he had, in orthodox fashion, buried his head in the folds of his snowy surplice—his wife saw to that, and always ironed it and his cambric bands herself—old Jonas, the clerk, at once let go the bell-rope, and hurried into his own small pen, ready to give out, in his peculiarly quavering fashion, the Morning Hymn, the singing of which, in the highest and shrillest key possible, and very much out of tune, was the first instalment of Divine service, as regularly performed at Seatondale.

Don't be shocked or triumphant, according to your proclivities, high or low, when I tell you that Mr. Clifford preached in his surplice. It was not because his tastes were Ritualistic—how could they be thirty years ago? He had no inclination to Puseyism, though it was already becoming rampant at the time of which I write, and he knew something about the great Tractarian movement, and had once read one of the "Tracts for the Times"—Tract XC., I believe—and had pronounced it "utter rubbish;" and as for his congregation, they knew no more of the schisms and heresies of the Episcopal Church to which they belonged than they knew of the ancient rivalry between Franciscans and Dominicans. They were as guiltless of semi-Romanism in any of its phases as are the Romanists themselves of toleration, or the Plymouth Brethren of



Christian charity; but they "kept their Church," and would never have dreamed of demeaning themselves to be "Methodies," Methodism being the only form of Dissent of which they had any conception.

Mr. Clifford preached in his surplice simply because his old Geneva gown was in rags, and no one thought of presenting him with a new one, also because there was no vestry to which he could retire, and there was a certain indecency in making his ecclesiastical toilet before all the people; also because he was a slovenly man, and "could na' be *fashed*" with a useless piece of ceremony! He was a scholar, and a gentleman, and a Christian man, according to his lights; but somehow, though of personable appearance, and what people called "well connected," preferment had never come in his way. The good things of Mother Church were not for him; her marrow and fatness, so far from being showered upon him, were not even doled out to him; in fact, she gave him only meagre rations—bare bread, just the corn, and not too much of that, without any of the wine and oil of life. Consequently he was a disappointed man, and felt little pleasure in his pastoral office; and but for his brave, cheery little wife, who was decidedly his "better half," he might have sunk down into a dull, morbid state of life, equally compounded of lazy torpor and despondency.

Such was the state of Seatondale when, in the soft April twilight, Aubrey Seaton first entered it—his lately lost inheritance. But, was it lost? Had the wonderful baby arrived or not? and if it had arrived would it choose to remain an inhabitant of this sublunary sphere? Little as the college-bred young man knew of babies, he was quite aware that they sometimes arrange, or rather have arranged for them, their Genesis and Exodus almost simultaneously. He did not actually wish that this particular baby might die; that would be wicked, he thought, though at the same time there were certain reasons why it might be far better that a Protestant baby should not live; but he could not help feeling that it would be a considerable blessing if some one were to come in and bring a bad report, as far as the tiresome baby was concerned, from the Hall.

The evening deepened into night, and Aubrey had supped liberally on delicious trout; it seemed to be the standing dish in these parts, he thought; and on coarse bread and indifferent cheese, washed down by a modest draught of small—*very small*—home-brewed beer. He was tired, but too restless to go up to the close little dormitory prepared for him just under the thatch. He had taken, as it seemed, very quietly the news he received at Chalfonts, but for all that his soul was shaken in its inmost depths. And "*What will Father Fabian say?*" was his ceaseless silent thought, as he reflected upon the astonishing changes which that little baby's advent must occasion. Clearly, Father Fabian was a person of importance.

Having finished his supper he went out into the pale moonlight, walking up and down on the sward, puffing now and then at a cigar which he did not appear to relish, and presently threw away; turning an anxious gaze in the direction of the Hall, knitting his brows, and talking softly to himself, invariably adding the refrain, "*What will Father Fabian say?*"

Meanwhile, the lady and her niece, Dinah, who was supposed to be the barmaid, were exercised in their minds upon the subject of the traveller. Who could he be? and what was his business? and why did he patronise "*the Golden Lion*," as the primitive little public-house presumptuously called itself? Gentlemen *did* come occasionally to the "*Golden Lion*;" but they were generally artists or fishermen, and Aubrey had neither sketching apparatus nor fishing tackle with him, therefore he could not have come to Seatondale "*to make pictures*," nor to indulge in the pastime of the gentle craft; and he had brought no luggage with him either, except a small saddle-bag, which, as Dinah contemptuously remarked, "*went for nothing*."

"*I hope he can pay his reckoning*," said that astute young woman; "*but I should just like to know who he is and what he does here*."

"*Whisht, lass!*" answered the old lady, her aunt; "*don't fash ye'self; I know a gentleman, I hope, when I see him. And this is a gentleman! Look how he holds himself, and what a good coat he wears!*"

"I've heard that London thieves—the flash ones—dress ever so grandly, and even wear rings upon their fingers," returned Dinah.

"But there's his horse! a beautiful beast it is, too. No common person would ride a horse like that!"

"P'raps he's stolen it," suggested the suspicious barmaid. "If I were you, aunt, I'd go in and talk a bit to him, and take the measure of him at once. Let you alone for seeing through a milestone when you do take the trouble to look at it. We should not like to be all murdered in our beds, you know, and he looks gloomy enough."

"Tut, child! What should anybody murder us for? And the lad's harmless enough, I'll go bail; why! he's but a lad, though he's got a good bit of hair upon his face and chin. Some has it early. Oh! here's Jonas."

Jonas, the clerk, always came in of an evening to smoke his pipe and hear the news—such as it was, as whose cow had calved, and who had lost a horse, and whose hay or corn was to be cut, or whose peats stacked, and what the papers said was doing in London-town the week before last! And Jonas was always willing to be consulted, and to give advice, and to prophesy of the coming weather. He hobbled sadly, for he had settled rheumatism, and he was much bent by the weight of years as well as by infirmity; still, for his age, he was a wonderful sprightly person, and seemed to be always in a communicative frame of mind, and ready to enjoy himself and be thankful for small mercies. He and Aubrey entered almost together, for the young man had just made up his mind to go indoors again and gossip with the people, who would be sure to know something about the *enfant terrible* at the Hall. So instead of turning into the sanded parlour where there was no fire, he went up to the wide kitchen hearth, on which the peats were blazing merrily, and began to warm his hands.

"It's rather cold for the time of the year," said he, affably, addressing no one in particular.

Jonas took upon himself to reply, "Well, sir, you see it is only April," which he pronounced Appril; "and the neets be cold, though the days be warm; t' sun has moighty power in t' month of Appril."

"I found that it had when I was riding over-sands this morning."

"An' ye comed ower sands t' mornin', then?"

"Yes, I did, and a fine ride I had, though I shouldn't care to take the same route on a winter's evening, or on a misty day. I never saw a more convenient place for getting comfortably drowned."

"Likely you comed from Lunechester, or Ribbleton, then, sir?"

"I left Lunechester this morning; I did not think it was quite so far to Seatondale."

"Maybe ye are come a-fishin' in our waters? We have t' best troots in a' the north country, an' there's grand big pikes in Easleby Tarn; but we haven't no *char* now, though once, they do say, they was in t' mere yonder."

"It's no use beating about the bush," said Aubrey to himself; "the old man will catechise me till morning, if I don't tell him my real business here, and I shall not get the information I want if I don't ask for it." Then aloud, "No! I am no fisherman—no fly-fisherman certainly; I have business with General Seaton; but when I heard there was illness at the Hall, I decided to put up at the inn for the night, rather than intrude myself upon the family."

"Then you didn't know what was expected at the Hall?" interposed the landlady, getting interested in the conversation. She liked to talk about births, deaths, and marriages.

"I heard the news at Chalfonts, where I dined," replied Aubrey—"and—and—I was rather surprised."

"A good many has been surprised," returned Mrs. Fluke; "I know I was! Says I—when I heard it first—'Tis too good to be true! Fifteen years married, and the General a-gettin' in years, and a bairn at last!"

"It's glorious!" put in Jonas. "It's only a lass, but she'll keep the black-hearted Papists out of the estate joost as well as a lad-bairn."

"Oh! it's a girl, then?" said Aubrey.

"Just so! and a very fine one, too, I am told; and the very moral of her pa—a real Seaton. I wonder, now,

what the Papist heir,—that is heir no longer, thank the Lord!—will say, when *he* hears of it!”

“Do you know him?” asked Aubrey, scarcely able to suppress a smile.

“Indeed, no! It wouldn’t become me, that’s been chapel-clerk these forty years an’ mair, to be consortin’ wi’ Papists. Besides, the Popish Seatons never show their faces here; it’s little welcome they’d get from any of us, to say nothing of t’ cold shoulder up at t’ Hall. It’s been t’ one thrubble of our General, that the place *must* go to the Jesuits; I’d bet you a pocket fu’ o’ money that he’s the happiest man in a’ t’ country the neet—as happy as t’ prime meenster, or t’ Archbishop o’ Caunterbury!”

“When was the young lady born?”

“This very afternoon, at a quarter to six *precisely*! I was in the kitchen mysel’, when one of t’ maids came in and tould it, and I made up my mind that I’d write a poem on the happy event. I haven’t writ one for a long time; but I’ll try now if the gift hain’t left me.”

“Oh! you are a poet, then, Mr. Clerk?”

“That is what I am, sir. In me you behold the poet of Seatondale, the only one; there’s nobody that writes verses but me in these parts, ’cept, indeed, one Mr. Wordsworth, at Rydal yander, and they do say he writes capital poetry. I don’t know; I never saw any of his lines, ’cept ‘We are Seven,’ and a piece about buttercups, and I didn’t think much o’ *them*; there was no grandeur in them;—t’ words didn’t *roll out* fine!”

“Have you written much, yourself?”

“Books and books full, lad! all fine sounding and stately verses! T’ best o’ all is my ‘Ode on t’ Gunpowder Plot,’ which was begun to be sung in church, but wasn’t purceeded with. You see, lad, I wanted something out of t’ common way; and I thought t’ fifth of November, when t’ Church and State celebrates gunpowder treason and plot, was a fitting time for it. So I spoke to t’ parson—not Meester Clifford—it was afore his time; old Thwaites was curate then, and he was terrible deaf. I thought he consented to my proposition, for he said, ‘Yes, Jonas, certainly, Jonas, by all means,’ as plain as he could. It seemed we were at cross-purposes, for he thought I was saying

something quite different. Well, I made my verses; Wordsworth o' Rydal never beat *them*, I know; and I settled about t' tune with the singers, telling them as t' parson agreed, which I thought was true, as why should not he? So, afore the sermon, I gave out, instead of t' psalm that was *down* to be sung, 'Let us sing to t' praise and gloury o' God, a few lines o' my ain composin'!—

“ “ Oh, what a glourious day was that,  
When England did conspire  
To blow up King and Parliament  
With g—u—n—powdure.” \*

Would you believe it, t' chapel-warden stepped up and spoke in t' parson's ear, and, for once, he wasn't a bit deaf! and he says, says he, ever so fierce, 'Don't sing that disgraceful *stuff*! give out t' psalm as I ordered!' So we sang an old psalm that we'd heard and sung a hundred times before! and when t' service was over, did not I get a sorting? and I was warned that if ever I did t' like again I should be turned out o' office. So I was just obliged to hide my talent in a napkin, like that ne'er-do-well in t' Gospel; but I knew it was a' envy and malice; and t' parson couldn't thole (bear) that his own chapel-clerk should outshine him.”

“But did you really give out those very lines?” asked Aubrey, in amazement.

“I really *did*! I'd say the rest to you, only my memory is not what it was. But what do you think o' that first verse, now?”

“I think it was a truly wonderful composition,” replied Aubrey, gravely. “I never heard anything like it in all my life.”

“I told you so!” cried Jonas, turning triumphantly to Mrs. Fluke and Miss Dinah. “You're a young man o' excellent judgment, I perceive. It was all old Thwaites' spite and jealousy; and my old woman—she was alive then—being led by him, never would let me send that fine poem to the *Fellshire Chronicle*.”

“That was a pity. It would have made quite a sensation in the country, I am sure. But perhaps it was not just quite the thing to sing in church. Now, I want to

\* A fact.

know why you did not ring the bells for the little heiress?"

"Ring the bells! there's only one bell to ring, and she's crackit. But I dare say they'll ring at Chalfonts to-morrow, perhaps to-night, if they hear the good news. They've a fine peal there, that can be heard all across t' bay." And then, of course, followed the legend of the Seaton bell, which need not be repeated. Aubrey thought Seatondale was a very curious place; he seemed to have gone back half a century since he started in the morning from Lunchester. Father Fabian had prepared him for primitive usages, and quaint speech; but he had not expected to see anybody like Jonas, nor could he help being surprised at the rough hospitality of the "Golden Lion"—the only inn in Seatondale.

Presently a girl in short blue petticoats and a loose red jacket came clattering in, and said something aside to Mrs. Fluke, who sat down as if she had had a shock, with her hand pressed to her side, and a concerned expression of countenance.

"What is it, aunt?" asked Dinah, looking impatiently at the new comer, who shook her head mysteriously, and made telegraphic signs with her fingers.

"Oh, deary, deary me!" cried the landlady, wiping her eyes with her coarse check apron. "Patty says the puir lady is taken for death! Are you *sure* it is true, my lass?"

"Ower sure! I'm just come from the Hall; nothing on airth can save her. She'll die afore morning, and t' puir wean 'll ha' no mither."

"T' wean's a' reet?" asked Jonas, anxiously.

"A' reet! A fine, grand bairnie, they all do say—t' fine Lunnon nurse, and a'! But oh! t' puir mistress! and t' auld General's fit to go demented, and cares nought ab't his bonnie lassie. I canna' bide, Mrs. Fluke! I maun gang on an' tell 'em at Airey's, an' at Crossthwaites', and at Salkeld's, and at——" And here Patty's shrill voice was drowned in the clatter of her heavy wooden soles, as she made her speedy exit without more ado.

Soon afterwards Aubrey went to bed, but not to sleep. Tired as he was, he lay wide awake thinking about the

baby heiress, and her dying mother, and the out-of-the-world corner in which he seemed to have dropped down, as from another planet. "Will the child live?" he asked himself again and again. "Do babies *generally* die when their mothers die?" He had some vague idea of having heard, or read, of infants being brought up "by hand," though what the process might be he could not determine. Altogether it occurred to him that a young child *might* survive and prosper, even though its mother departed this life. And then he began to frame a letter to Father Fabian, and while arranging a rather complicated sentence which seemed to imply that he did care and that he did not care, he at last fell asleep.

When he awoke it was high day; a light morning shower was falling, and the April sun was struggling through the clouds. All the valley lay in golden mists, but the mountain-tops were clear and well-defined. Jonas had prophesied "a drappin' day" the night before. Aubrey opened the little casement to let the morning in, and the sweet air stole into the unventilated little chamber, and gave him fresh strength and vigour. He took from his saddle-bag a case containing an old yellow ivory crucifix, most exquisitely carved. He improvised a sort of altar on the deep window-seat, and then he knelt down and went through his orisons as best he might in such an atmosphere of heresy. His prayers were long and monotonous, but they were over at last; and as he rose from his knees, and began to think about his breakfast, he heard a strange booming sound which swelled like a murmur on the morning breeze. Was it not the tolling of a bell? He listened intently. Yes, it was a knell; it was what the north country people still call the "passing bell."

Clearer and deeper came the tones, as slowly, and more slowly still, they smote upon his ear. Like a spell, the solemn voice kept him motionless and almost breathless by the open window. He looked out; there was the dew upon the grass, the golden raindrops on the budding trees, the vaporous gleam about the little rush-fringed mere, the smile of sunshine on the grey-scarred crags, and, above all, silent, steadfast, and calmly grand, "the everlasting



hills," that seemed to answer the booming knell—that said, "All flesh is grass; the grass withereth, the flower fadeth;" with "before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, *Thou art God!*"

Awed and saddened, Aubrey knelt down, and said rapidly the prayers of his Church for the newly dead; and then he started up, remembering that he prayed for a heretic, who, according to the faith in which he had been reared, must be "*eternally damned!*" As he pondered, the bell stopped, but only for a moment or so. Then it rang out three quick strokes, and again, after a pause, another three, according to the ancient custom of the country—three tolls for a child, six for a woman, nine for a man. The last triplet came not; the bell struck six times, and then was silent, till in about half a minute it commenced to tell the years of the departed. Aubrey counted—ten—twenty—thirty. "How old she must have been!" thought he. But the bell told only *forty*, and then the echoes died away mournfully among the hills.

When he came down, Mrs. Fluke's eyes were red with weeping, and Miss Dinah was dropping tears upon the inevitable trout she was grilling for his breakfast. Mrs. Seaton was dead; had died at daybreak in her husband's arms; but the baby was alive, and likely to do well. And the General had shut himself up with his overwhelming sorrow, and refused to see any one. Mr. Clifford was empowered to give all necessary directions.

"What am I to do?" asked the young man of himself, when his breakfast was over, and he stood at the window watching the slants of rain and sunshine as they passed in transient light and shade across the dale. "Shall I go back again, and let my presence here be rumoured to my uncle? I cannot intrude upon him now; it is impossible. It would be the height of indecency to present myself at such a moment to him. And yet—the case is serious. How shall I best obey Father Fabian? I will write to him fully at once, and then await his orders. Or—shall I?—will it be wise?—shall I visit this heretic priest Clifford, and tell him who I am, and acquaint myself with the exact position of affairs? Yes; that will be best. Father

Fabian cannot advise me from a distance, unless he is made acquainted with much more than I can at present tell him. I will seek an interview with Mr. Clifford, and then I will frame my despatches to the Father."

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## CHAPTER IV.

## THE OLD GREY COAT.

" Within those walls so whitely glistening now,  
Then seamed and sadden'd by a thousand years,  
Again shall plead the daily sacrifice  
Offered by priests who Peter own as head;  
And far the echoes of their chant shall float  
O'er mountain billows of the Western sea  
To a new world, all England, Saxon all  
From pole to pole, as is our Saxon isle."

PROPHECY OF S. EDWARD THE CONFESSOR.

AUBREY SEATON found the curate in that enviable position which may be briefly described as "the bosom of his family!" That is to say, being deserted by his better half, he was keeping guard over the whole nursery troupe, who were frisking about him, and climbing up him and getting upon his back, and swarming over him, without much regard to his own convenience. Amid the riot and uproar of his progeny, it was not singular that the visitor's knock should be unheard, nor that the servant's tap at the door of the sitting-room should be inaudible; it therefore followed that Aubrey, suddenly ushered into the presence of the heretic priest, made his *début* with startling abruptness. The Cliffords kept only one woman servant, assisted by a girl, aged fourteen years, who was supposed "to run after the children, and keep them out of mischief;" and it was this small domestic who, disturbed at her early dinner, answered the door, and, being asked if Mr. Clifford were at home and disengaged, at once introduced the stranger to the general living-room of the family.

Aubrey felt not a little astonished ; accustomed only to the sleek, celibate fathers of his own Church, he had scarcely realised how widely they differed from the married Protestant parsons. Could this man be in any sort of holy orders ? There was not, or so it seemed then, the slightest clerical air about him ! Visitors, especially casual visitors, were so rare in Seatondale that no one ever thought of expecting them unless by appointment, and people were not quite so particular as they might have been in regard to their toilet, or to the decent appointment of their establishments. Even the General and his wife, with plenty of money, and a retinue of servants at command, had been wont to deplore certain slovenly habits which had grown upon them as the result of their long rustic seclusion, so far away from the world of forms and ceremonies. It is, then, no marvel that the Cliffords, lacking cash and servitors, and nearly everything in fact, except children, should occasionally be found in terrible *déshabille* and inextricable confusion.

The curate could seldom afford a new suit of clothes, and as he must keep at least one tolerably decent suit of orthodox black, it behoved him to be extremely careful of his Sunday-going coat and trousers, and to make them last as long as possible. There is no ecclesiastical law, I believe, which constrains a Protestant clergyman to appear always in conventional clerical garb, and therefore many of them do as Mr. Clifford did, and assume the parsonic livery only on canonical occasions. The curate of Seatondale never dreamed of wearing black on week-days ; his flock would have been struck with astonishment had they found him in his Sunday coat from Monday morning to Saturday night. Unless he was going to dine at the Hall, or to ride into Chalfonts, or unless some of the Chalfonts or Lunechester magnates were expected at Seatondale, he invariably made his appearance in a coarse grey suit and a battered straw hat, in the crown of which he wore a pocket-handkerchief in very cold seasons, and a cabbage leaf in hot weather.

But the curate had several grey suits in divers stages of shabbiness ; there was one, seemly enough, though quite unclerical ; there was another, very much the worse for

wear, which still served for dirty days and after-dark perambulations : and there was yet another, so worn, so faded, so patched, and so sadly costermongerish in its general aspect, that it was never seen beyond the family circle. It was the easiest coat he had, Mr. Clifford was wont to say ; and when quite sure that he would be undisturbed he liked to put it on, and "be comfortable." I am sorry to say that it was now, in its extreme old age, no longer grey, but motley. It rivalled the patriarch Joseph's coat, so far as variety of colour went, though probably in no other respect. Failing remnants of the proper hue, stray pieces of cloth, brown, blue, bottle-green, and even red, had been employed in the innumerable repairs which it had undergone at the nimble hands of the curate's thrifty consort ; she had begged him some time since to lay it aside. "Indeed, my dear," she implored, "it is only fit for a scarecrow ! but I want a new rag-mop, and it will come in for that admirably."

The good man, however, being essentially a Conservative, could not make up his mind to discard the cherished garment in which he had spent many a peaceful hour. He always insisted that it would pay for another good mending-up, and that it would save a better coat ; and so urged, Mrs. Clifford, like an excellent wife as she was, took the thing in hand, again and again, till scarcely anything of the original fabric remained. It was like the boy's enduring knife, that had had two new handles and three new blades since first he purchased it ; or similar to that famous bonnet, of which an economical old lady boasted that it had lasted her nine years—with *only* three new pokes, and four new crowns—real bonnets being worn in the days to which I allude.

"Some day you will be caught in this disgraceful array," said Mrs. Clifford more than once ; and she was almost tempted to convert the harlequin garment into rag-mops there and then on her own responsibility ; but, Cassandra-like, her prophecies were not believed, though fated to be accomplished. Had the good wife been at home, the good man would not have been permitted thus to neglect his personal appearance, for it was now two o'clock in the afternoon ; but she was at the Hall, and the servants,

encroaching on their master's kindness, lingered a long time over their dinner of boiled pork and greens.

Having to play nursemaid for the nonce, the curate rather congratulated himself on being apparelled as he was. What did it matter what he wore, with the last baby on one knee, a scrambling, toddling thing at the other; a fine lusty four-year-old "gee-up-ing" on his shoulders, and several more juveniles skirmishing wildly about him? Already the luckless coat had sustained a rent, and was otherwise damaged—if damaged it really could be. The room was strewn with such playthings as fall to the lot of needy curates' children; the chairs and tables were at sixes and sevens; mamma's workbox had been sacrilegiously rifled, and lay open on the floor; Baby Tommy was doing his best to deprive his luckless parent of eyesight; Baby Johnny had stolen one of the paternal slippers—oh, such slippers!—and was apparently endeavouring to make a dessert of it. And it was on this domestic scene that young Aubrey Seaton found himself unceremoniously obtruded. And this was what the Protestant clergy gained by matrimony! Like the proverbial jewel in the swine's snout seemed all these healthy, noisy, romping children in their clerical father's arms—for they all crowded up to him and hung upon him at the alarming sight of a strange gentleman—to this monk-bred young Papist.

Mr. Clifford rose in confusion, and tumbled the eldest baby into the fender, which careless proceeding naturally elicited a tremendous shrieking, in the form of a solo, quickly changed into a duett, and from a duett into a chorus. Not a word could be exchanged between the luckless *paterfamilias* and his abashed visitor—as you, who know what a real nursery riot, in mamma's absence, is like, may easily believe. As well might the gentlemen have essayed to carry on civilities on opposite sides of Lodore, when the water was coming down, *à la* Southey. And then the dismayed curate remembered his disreputable attire—that he had a head of hair fresh from that *coiffure* which only infant fingers can produce. And he could not ring the bell, simply because there was no bell to ring; and Agnes, the eldest daughter of the house, was so intent in hauling Johnny out of the fireplace, before his pinafore

caught fire, that she took no heed of her father's command to take the elder children away, and send Bathsheba for the babies.

Order, however, was at last restored; the small fry tumbled out of the room, with Bathsheba, the junior domestic, at their head, and Mr. Clifford and his visitor were alone. The curate would have given half a sovereign—a considerable sum for him—to have been more respectably apparelled; a grave suspicion that he was “a disgrace to the cloth” stole over him, and did not tend to restore his composure. He wisely resolved to make the best of it; and, after all, the stranger was little more than a boy, for Aubrey had a very youthful appearance, which, I need not say, was to him—just aspiring to full-blown manhood—a subject of regret.

“Pray excuse all this disorder,” said the curate, trying to look unconcerned; “my wife is unavoidably absent, my servants are sadly inefficient, and I have not the knack of managing these youngsters. When you are a married man, you will understand all about it!”

“I devoutly hope I shall not!” thought Aubrey, but he replied modestly, “It is I who should pray to be excused. I am in some difficulty here, and I come to you to help me out of it.”

The curate shuddered; being always in some sort of difficulty himself, and chiefly pecuniary difficulty, he naturally objected to appeals of this nature. A stranger's “difficulty” was generally impecuniosity, and Mrs. Fluke's reckoning to pay; but Aubrey scarcely looked like the wandering artists and indigent authors, all unknown to fame, who occasionally honoured Seatondale with their presence. “I am afraid, sir, you could not come to a worse person,” replied the curate, nervously; “I would help all mankind if I could, though I don't find mankind very willing to help me; but I have not the means——”

“I require no help of that kind, I assure you,” interrupted the young man, blushing furiously. “It is your advice I want—perhaps your intervention; in short, my name is Aubrey Seaton, and I reached this place late last evening, bound for the Hall, intending, of course, to

pay my respects to the General, my uncle. But being told what was taking place, I hesitated to intrude, and so concluded to pass the night at the little inn up yonder; this morning I hear the sad news of Mrs. Seaton's death, and I scarcely know how to act. I have arrived at a most infelicitous moment, and I am uncertain how to shape my course. Shall I leave Seatondale without seeing my uncle, or shall I remain here and attend the funeral as one of the family?"

Mr. Clifford forgot all about his ragged patchwork coat, and his unkempt hair, so deeply was he interested in this short explanation. He knew perfectly who Aubrey Seaton was, for the General had spoken freely of the youth's prospective discomfiture, and his sudden dismay when the birth of the Protestant heir should be reported to him. And here he was in the flesh, come most inopportunely upon the scene of his lost inheritance, and what was to be done with him? The young man might well complain of being in a difficulty. Still he did not want money probably, and that was in his favour; the curate felt satisfied that no demands on his purse would be made, and he rather liked being consulted, and giving advice—about the cheapest commodity which one can give.

"I understand," was Mr. Clifford's answer. "I have heard of you, of course. You are the son of the General's only brother, Francis Seaton, of Southerleigh, and—and—" he hesitated, scarcely liking to proceed; but Aubrey finished his sentence for him.

"And whilom heir of the Seatondale estates, which now descend to the young lady at the Hall—my little motherless cousin."

"I fear, sir, the disappointment comes somewhat abruptly; the General is not a man with whose affairs one would like to interfere, but I did venture to hint that it would be as well to inform the family of his happy expectations."

"It would only have been courteous, not to say kind; but between the two houses there has been no intercourse to speak of these many years. The question of differing faiths has kept us wide apart."

"The General felt very deeply the perversion of his

sister, Miss Seaton; her taking the veil was a real sorrow to him, and he thought, perhaps unjustly, that she was influenced by her brother, your father. It is singular that of the three children left by Anthony Seaton, two of them should have embraced the tenets of the Church of Rome."

"Not so very singular, when you come to look at it fairly," said Aubrey. "They only returned to the faith of their forefathers; till my great-grandfather, Francis Seaton, embraced heresy, the Seatons were staunch Catholics, devoted to the interests of their Church, and the majority of them remained, and still remain, faithful to the old religion. General Seaton stands alone in his heresy—I beg pardon, I should say *Protestantism*."

"Not quite alone, now. He has his daughter, who will be brought up a Protestant, and carefully trained in the faith and doctrines of the Church of England—that is to say, if the little one lives, and my wife tells me she is as healthy a babe as one could desire, and cries as lustily as an older child. You will have to be content with Southerleigh, Mr. Seaton."

"I suppose so; and as it is foolish as well as impious to rebel against Providence, who of course sent this child into the world so late in the day, I resign myself to the inevitable, though I cannot help wishing that my father had received some notice of the expected family event. It was he who ought to have been duly informed; I was only his heir, not my uncle's you know. Had General Seaton died a year ago, my father would now be the lawful possessor of the Seatondale estates."

"Yes! yes! we understand that; you were next in succession after your father; but when a man does not inherit till he is upwards of sixty, one naturally looks to his son and heir as a person of some importance. I presume you have seen General Seaton?"

"Never, Mr. Clifford. It was always understood that the two families were to a certain extent at feud; and little was said of the northern Seatons in my presence till I was almost grown up. I cannot quite remember when it was that I first knew of our probable inheritance, but I was carefully trained with the understanding that one day,



when it should please God to remove my father, my possessions would be considerable, and my responsibilities of the gravest. I have not been brought up very much at home: I went a mere child to St. Omer, where I have a near relative high in office; also, I have been at St. Alphonso's College, which is under the special supervision of the Jesuit Fathers."

"You are the only son, I believe?"

"The only surviving son; my brother Francis, who was many years my senior, was accidentally drowned in early youth. I have four sisters, three of whom are in religion."

"I beg pardon, I don't quite catch your meaning."

"It is a phrase we commonly use—we Catholics—among ourselves; 'in religion' means vowed to a religious life, belonging to a religious order."

"A nun, in short."

"Yes; my three sisters are nuns, but one only belongs to a strictly enclosed order. The other two are sisters of mercy. The youngest of all, who is only eighteen, seems to have no religious vocation, for which I cannot help being thankful; it would be hard if I might not have one sister, and my father, who has delicate health, one daughter, at home."

"Very hard, indeed, Mr. Seaton. This breaking up—this severance of family ties is one of the principles of your religion to which I must say I strongly object. Have you lunched?"

To Mr. Clifford's infinite relief, he replied that he had. If a negative had been returned, the curate would indeed have been on the horns of a most cruel dilemma; either he must expose himself to the charge of churlish inhospitality, or he must reveal the nakedness of the land; there was probably nothing but lukewarm boiled pork and bread and cheese to set before the stranger.

"Well, sir," resumed Aubrey, "what do you advise?"

"I scarcely know. I wish my wife were at home; in delicate affairs like this, women have a better judgment than we have; they have a sort of intuition, which tells them at once what to do. I think General Seaton ought to know of your arrival, but he has shut himself up in his

own room, and will admit no one ; that was the latest news from the Hall."

"If I thought I could carry him the smallest consolation I would at once present myself, but I fear I could do nothing, and there would be a certain indelicacy in forcing myself upon him at such a time. Also, I imagine he is prejudiced against me on account of my religion."

"I must confess that he has a strong aversion to Romanism ; in fact, he is what we call an ultra-Protestant, which I am not. I am staunch, you know—staunch and sound ; but I do not go into extremes."

"I congratulate you on your moderation, sir ; it is ultra-opinion and want of charity which lead to so much dissension among good people, who ought to be fast friends. I am, I hope, a devout son of our most holy Church ; but I cannot help respecting worth and virtue wherever I find them. I am a true Catholic, but a liberal one—far more liberal, I fear, than my father and others quite approve of."

"I am delighted to hear you speak thus, Mr. Seaton. I am sure the General ought to know you ; he imagines you to be a bigoted Papist—excuse me, *Romanist* ! Nay, that is scarcely better ; and the force of habit is so strong, and——"

"Pray don't apologise ; I have used the term '*heretic*,' you have said '*Papist*'—a Roland for an Oliver, that is all ! Let us converse freely, pray ; where no offence is intended none should be taken, and two Christian gentlemen may surely speak to each other on controversial subjects with frankness as well as with charity. I confess that I have been taught by the good fathers to regard Protestants as heretics, and you, too, have been accustomed from your childhood, no doubt, to regard us as 'poor, deluded Papists.' Now, I hold the Church of England to be in error—great error ; but I nevertheless hold her in esteem and reverence ; she has nearly all the elements of a true Church in her system ; she needs only to be united once more to the Mother, from whose loving arms she, in an evil hour, and under a strong delusion, tore herself away. Mr. Clifford, I confess to you—heretic priest as you are—that the dream of my boyhood has been, and the hope of

my manhood is, to see once more the grand old Church of England truly Catholic and at one with Rome."

"As a clergyman of the Church of England, sir, I cannot pretend to say I share your aspirations. I should be loth, very loth, to bend my neck to the yoke of Rome."

"But, Mr. Clifford, the yoke of Rome is the yoke of Christ; and that is easy, you know."

"Forgive me, Mr. Seaton, if I cannot agree with you; it seems to me that Christ's own teachings and the teachings of your Church differ essentially on many points. May I ask you if you have ever inquired into the doctrines of Protestantism?"

"To some extent I have, and am satisfied that it is we who are of the true Church, against which the gates of hell cannot prevail. Still, I must own that I have seen little of the workings of the Protestant religion; I have lived so much with the Jesuit fathers and with others devoted heart and soul to the interests of the Church. But I can assure you the fathers do not require a mere blind obedience; they instruct us very fully in the tenets of our faith, and explain to us where your doctrines and ours meet, and where they diverge. Only the other day I saw on the table of my revered preceptor and cousin, the Protestant missal—the 'Book of Common Prayer' I think you call it. I took it up and opened it, and was at once interested in its contents. I asked the father if I might study it, and he replied, 'Certainly, my son; hitherto you have looked only on the golden side of the shield, now contemplate the reverse; examine the silver side—remembering only that silver, especially when mixed with alloy, is, and ever must be, inferior to pure gold. Take the book and read it carefully; you will find in it much that is excellent, and scarcely anything that need be expunged. It does not go far enough, that is all; it is, in fact, a book of *selections* from the Mass, and portions of the Mass are certainly better than none.' So I took the book and read it, and was delighted to find on how many points our Churches cordially agree. And, sir, young as I am, I have read the signs of the times, and I perceive that we are on the eve of a grand religious revolution; the venerable faith will, I doubt not, be restored in my own day, if I live out

my allotted years, threescore and ten. England will be Catholic once more. *Your Church* will not be destroyed, God forbid ! But she will be blended with ours ; the holy Mass will again be offered in Westminster Abbey ; ancient piety will be rekindled ; there will be, as our blessed Lord foretold, ‘one fold and one Shepherd,’ and God will be glorified !”

But Mr. Clifford shook his head ; he could neither desire nor believe in such a startling consummation ; though the idea of an universal Church rather pleased him, he only said, “The Church of England, dear sir, will never hold the dogma of transubstantiation, nor sanction the practice of auricular confession—two immense hindrances to the fusion of our mutual articles of religion.”

“The Church of England holds *consubstantiation* : her Prayer-book distinctly teaches it. It is more than implied in your sacramental service that the bread and the wine are, after consecration, *something different from what they were before* !”

“Certainly, oh, certainly ! We do to a certain extent reverence the sacred elements. We decently dispose of the bread and wine which remain after all have communicated ; it is not allowed to be carried out of the church. We take the middle course, you see. The Dissenters are shockingly profane, but as their sacraments can be but a mere pretence, it does not so much matter ; I have an intense horror of Dissent. You Romanists are certainly superstitious. As I said, we of the Reformed Church take the medium view—we reverence the bread and wine, but we don’t worship it.”

“It seems to me that you believe either too much or too little ; the consecrated bread and wine are either the very body and blood of Christ, or *they are not* ! I cannot conceive of any medium faith.”

“Take a cup of tea with me, and we will talk it over,” said the curate eagerly. “Excuse me, while I throw off this harlequin raiment, which was donned for the children, and then I am at your service.”

Aubrey consented, and Mr. Clifford began to run over in his mind all the staple arguments of the controversialists on his own side. This was a mere lad, he thought

still, a very thoughtful lad ; what glory it would be if he could win him over to Protestantism ! The task could surely not be *very* difficult ; at any rate, he would do his best. Aubrey Seaton once converted, there would be no danger of the broad lands of Seatondale falling into Romish keeping, even if the little heiress should not be reared.

They spent the evening in controversy ; neither gentleman lost his temper, which is something to say of theological disputants ; but when Aubrey rose to return to his inn, each one was apparently unmoved in his convictions—they were precisely as they had been at starting. Finally it was arranged that next day Aubrey should return to the comfortable inn at Chalfonts, and remain there for a few days, or at least till the General could be made aware of his vicinity.

“ A very nice young fellow,” said Mr. Clifford, afterwards, to his wife ; “ and we must not lose sight of him. He is really open to conviction, and as liberal as any Protestant, though he does prophesy the restoration of the Mass in all our cathedrals, and the revival of auricular confession.”

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## CHAPTER V.

### OFF THE RAILS.

“ Her beauty is exquisite, her favour infinite,  
Her love sincere, her thoughts immaculate,  
Her tears pure messengers sent from her heart,  
Her heart as far from fraud as heaven from earth.”

AUBREY SEATON went to Chalfonts, and took possession of Mrs. Drewitt's most comfortable rooms, Mr. Clifford promising to communicate with him frequently. Once there he despatched a long letter to Father Fabian, giving a full, true, and particular account of all that had happened at Seatondale, including his own interview with the curate. On the fourth day of his sojourn at the “Thurston Arms” he received, in answer to his lengthy epistle, a few lines

from his spiritual director, bidding him come over at once to Lunechester, where he would give him the meeting and talk over what had recently occurred. The letter was brief, affording no clue to the writer's own feelings, and it was written in Latin. It was nearly noon when it reached Aubrey, for the post, at all times irregular, came in unusually late that morning. All Chalfonts knew by this time that he was the "Papist heir," whose nose poor little missy had "put out of joint," and Mrs. Drewitt was not a little proud of her distinguished guest, whom she treated with due respect, but at the same time with a motherly consideration, which was all the better for the young man, who knew so little of womanly ministrations.

He had made himself quite free of the house from the beginning; so now, having read his letter, he ran down into the kitchen, where his hostess was very busy at the kneading-tub, getting ready her batch of white bread for the oven. Aubrey was as inquisitive as a child about these common household matters; he found a singular charm in this simple domestic life, after the grave and learned seclusion of his youth in school and cloister. Earlier in the day he had been initiated into all the mysteries of making treacle-beer; now he was interested in watching the dough dexterously made up into loaves and cakes, or put into baking-tins by the experienced hands of the good landlady, who was indeed that valuable creature, "a woman of faculty."

However, at this moment he could not discuss the specialities of bread-making; he must inquire as to the best and quickest way of getting to Lunechester, for the tide-table which hung up in the passage told him that a journey "over-sands" was quite out of the question. He asked Mrs. Drewitt what he must do; and she, quickly understanding that the summons was imperative and brooked no delay, replied, "Well then, sir, my master shall drive you to Farleton, or you can ride there on Sultan if you choose; but then you'll have to leave your beast till you return, or till some one fetches him back here; and I shouldn't care to leave a horse of my own in Roger Bruntskill's keeping. I think you had better be driv over by the master, sir."

"How am I to proceed from Farleton, and how far is it from Chalfonts?"

"Farleton's a matter of six or seven miles as the crow flies; but then human creatures are not crows; they're bound to make use of roads and bridges, for the quicksands beyond Earnseat are as bad as any on this coast; and so you have to go a long way round, up river, till you come to a bridge that you can cross. And at Farleton there's the trains stopping four or five times a day; and once on the railway it's but a short run to Lunechester."

"Four or five times a day! I must consult my 'Bradshaw.' Oh, there is a train I see at 1.20, a full hour from this time; can I catch it?"

"That you *can't*, sir! The roads are rough, and it don't do to drive the beasts full speed up them hills. You must try for the next train, Mr. Seaton."

"That is not till four o'clock, Mrs. Drewitt."

"So much the better, sir! You can have a comfortable dinner—it shall be forwarded at once; and you can travel without hurry to Farleton, and be in plenty of time. But you are coming back to us, I hope, sir?"

"Oh, yes! at least I hope so; my movements will be decided by the friend I am going to meet at Lunechester; but at present I think of returning here to-morrow, or at latest the day after. I shall only take with me the saddle-bag I brought with me at my first visit; the portmanteau which was forwarded afterwards I shall leave in your charge, and of course I don't give up the rooms."

"All right, sir. Now I'll just see about your dinner; I've got a fine sea-trout for you to-day, by way of change—what we call a *mort* in these parts. Will that do, with the cold beef and mashed potatoes, and two or three of the lemon cheese-cakes you are so fond of?"

"Do! I should think so! you are making a regular *gourmand* of me, Mrs. Drewitt. I shall be spoiled for the plain frugal fare to which I have been accustomed. And this is a fine place for Catholics, you have such good fish—river-fish, and lake-fish, and sea-fish—and plenty of it!"

"That's as the weather turns out, sir; we're short enough of flat-fish and round-fish sometimes—flat-fish is *flocks*, and

round-fish is *salmon-mort*, what you'll have to-day. But it's said the monks of old always did choose a nice sheltered place, where there were plenty of streams to fish in: of course they thought about their fast days; though how a good meal of fresh-caught fish can be called *fasting*, I don't know! I often prefer it to meat, which is difficult to get here, especially in hot weather, when it won't keep. And the fishers and the farming folk all about for miles round keep more fasts than any priests or monks; for some of them never taste butcher's meat for weeks and months together, and don't always have bacon. Potatoes, garden-greens—mostly kail,—oatmeal cakes, and porridge is their bill of fare, year in and year out, with a treat of berry-pasties in the summer, when berries are plentiful."

"Berries, Mrs. Drewitt? what sort of berries?"

"I believe you southerners call them *gooseberries*. We don't: we always speak of them as *berries* only—it saves trouble; and besides, geese don't eat them, unless it's human geese! But you see, the country folk here do a lot of your sort of fasting, and wish for nothing better. If you leave the roast beef out, sir, and eat a few more lemon cheese-cakes, or have a tuck-in, as you call it, at my raspberry-jam, you can keep a fast to-day; and won't that be what's called a work of supererogation?"

"Now that is too bad, Mrs. Drewitt, always having your fling at the poor Catholics. I wonder you don't turn me out instead of feeding me on all the nice things you can lay your hands on. In spite of my religion, I believe you like me a little."

"I like you more than a little, if I may be so bold as to say it, Mr. Seaton, and so does my master. We had a little lad that would have been about your age now, if he had lived; it's very foolish, I know, but somehow you do remind me of my dead baby that's been in the churchyard these twenty-one years. Yes, I like you, sir; I don't know when I've seen anybody that I've liked so well; I said so to my master this very morning, when I was seeing after the ham and eggs and the girdle cakes for your breakfast; but I don't like your religion, sir, and I tell you what I mean to do. Every morning and every night, when I say my prayers, I'll put in a bit on your account, and ask the



Lord to show you the error of your ways, and make a good sound Protestant of you before you die! There, sir!"

For a moment Aubrey felt taken a little aback; but he answered quickly, "Two can play at that game, Mrs. Drewitt. I shall say two *Aves* and a *Paternoster* three times a day for your conversion from heresy."

"And much good will that do! You might as well patter a charm at once. I don't call that praying, I call it *saying words*."

"Holy words, though, are they not? The *Paternoster* is the Lord's Prayer, you know. Your own Church says it several times over in the course of one service. The *Ave Maria* is the 'Hail Mary.'"

"Which, thank goodness, my Church *don't* say at all, sir. And I often think we need not have the 'Our Father' over and over again; it seems so much like what the Master Himself called 'vain repetitions.' I'd like to have a little talk about the Virgin Mary, whom you make a goddess of, but if I don't give my mind to your dinner, it will be ruined, and my idea is that you serve God most acceptably by doing the work you have in hand with all your heart, and to the best of your capacity."

The dinner was splendidly cooked, and just as it was finished, mine host came in to say that if Mr. Seaton liked to ride Sultan, and cross the ferry at Sandside, it would save several miles of road, and all the steepest hills, and he would go with him on his own roan mare, and bring back Sultan to Chalfonts in the evening. That seemed much the better plan, and Aubrey at once agreed to it, and at the appointed time they set forth and reached Farleton quite a quarter of an hour before the train appeared. Aubrey, however, had several last words to say to Sam Drewitt, just at the last moment; and as only one person got out at Farleton Station and only one person—himself—was going on, the guard with scant ceremony hustled him into the nearest carriage, not looking at the ticket which Aubrey held in his hand.

"I'm *first*," expostulated Aubrey, holding out the ticket, as Mr. Guard almost bundled him into a dusty, uncomfortable second-class compartment, in which was sitting a solitary young lady.

"Can't help it, sir," returned the surly official "shouldn't have loitered; the train's behind time—slow train;—change at next station if you like." And the door was banged to, and Aubrey shut in with the young lady passenger, of whom he felt nervously afraid; for he was a bashful youth in many respects, and his experience of the fair sex was very nearly *nil*. Excepting his sister Millicent—and they had spent but little time together—Aubrey Seaton had never in all his life exchanged half-a-dozen words with any young lady. He got on very well with old crones, and nice, elderly, motherly women like Mrs. Drewitt; but a young lady of his own age, or younger, was quite another thing; and he had learned somewhere or somehow—it was surely not taught him by the saintly fathers of St. Omer or St. Alphonso—that all girls were merciless *quizzes*, and made dreadful fun of their compeers of the other sex who were unlucky enough to come within reach of their criticism.

The maiden, who was to Aubrey such a veritable she-dragon, sat in one corner of the carriage, with her back to the engine; he immediately seated himself in the corner most remote from hers, with his face to the steam-horse, and drawing from his pocket a book, he proceeded to pore over it with the intentness of one who has to get the page by heart within a limited time. Nevertheless, he felt a little curiosity on account of his fair neighbour; it struck him suddenly that this was the first time, to the best of his recollection, that he had ever been alone with any girl, save Millicent. What was she like? He could hardly tell; for her bonnet shaded her face, as bonnets did, you know, thirty years ago;—and she wore a blue gauze veil—not a mere coquettish "fall," such as we wear now, to enhance rather than to conceal our charms—and it was almost as impenetrable to the eye as a mask; at least, Aubrey found it so, though he glanced several times in the direction of the motionless female figure, sitting with its gloved hands demurely clasped on the front breadths of a well-worn black silk dress.

"Is she really a girl or a woman? a married woman, perhaps!" he asked himself; then he went on, as he quietly made his observations—"No! she is not a woman,

not a woman grown, I think ; she has quite a girlish look ; I dare say she is fresh from school. Perhaps she would smell of bread and butter if I went nearer to her. I wonder if she is pretty ? her hands are pretty, as far as shape goes, and that's a trim little foot peeping out from under the black silk. And she has a long, slim neck, and drooping shoulders, too, and she's slender and altogether graceful. Is she dark or fair, now ? I wish she would put up that stupid veil ! I do not want to speak to her, but I should very much like to know the colour of her hair and of her eyes. I wonder if she is at all like Millicent ? She is a lady, I am sure, though she is so poorly dressed, and travelling second-class. What does she keep so still for ? She might be a lay figure sitting there, without voice or motion. Can she see through that abominable blue rag ? I should like to know. I do believe she can, and she must be thinking what an impudent fellow I am to stare at her so much."

Just then the train slackened pace at Keirmouth, which was not, as it is now, an important junction, but an insignificant roadside station, and then, to Aubrey's mingled confusion and delight, the fair incognita raised her veil, put it back over her plain straw bonnet, and looked out, as if to ascertain her whereabouts. As she put her head well out of the window, he was not at first much benefited by the transaction, but as the train, after the briefest stoppage, started again, she resumed her old position, though without bringing the veil back again over her face.

And that face fairly startled Aubrey Seaton, it was so very lovely ! And yet it was a sad face for one so young—she could not be more than nineteen, he thought—a face on which sorrow had set its impress, a pale, Madonna-like face, with perfect, clear-cut features, delicate profile, dark, serious eyes, and rose-red lips. As Aubrey looked, his gaze met hers. She was clearly no unformed school-girl ; she seemed perfectly composed, although she was being stared at as if she were a picture ; her full eyelids drooped a little, and a faint, pink flush dyed her cheek for a moment, but she regarded the stranger with a quiet, steady expression, which seemed

to say that she was no vain coquette, and quite accustomed to take care of herself.

"Who can her people be that they let her travel all alone?" said Mr. Seaton to himself. "I never saw a lovelier face on canvas—nay, nor one so lovely. A common girl would have frowned, or bridled, or giggled when our eyes met; this one calmly gives back the glance, as if she lived in another sphere into which I could not possibly intrude. Thoroughly self-possessed, and endowed with a silent dignity that needs no assertion, she looks like a young queen. Yet there is no trace of haughtiness on that clear brow, and oh! what glorious eyes—deep, thoughtful, even sad—and yet how sweet! She is modest and retiring, but not bashful, I am sure, and she would resent a liberty with quiet, silent scorn. I could fancy those full, rosy lips—that smile so tenderly, I know—curling with cold contempt under just provocation. Dear me, what a simpleton I am! we shall soon be at Luncheon, and she will go on her way to Leeds, Birmingham, Rugby, London—I don't know where! and I shall make my bow and take my leave, and never set eyes on her again. Well, I've seen wonderful pictures, but I never could have imagined a real, living piece of flesh and blood so truly beautiful."

For a few minutes Aubrey addressed himself to his book, and he read a few sentences without the smallest conception of the sense of them. Then he glanced again towards the corner of the carriage in which his companion sat, and this time he was able to take a good long view, for the girl was looking away from him, evidently lost in her own sad thoughts, and seemingly unconscious of his presence. He was sure the full red lips quivered as with repressed emotion, and he thought a tear or two beaded the black silky fringes that swept the pure pale cheek. She was lovelier than at the first glance, but she was clearly in some kind of trouble.

"I wonder what is the matter with her now?" was his cogitation; "I wish I could help her; I suppose she would think I insulted her if I dared to address her, for somehow it seems to be a sort of principle in England that young men and young women, who don't know one another,

should regard each other as natural enemies ! Somebody has vexed her, perhaps ; I should like to punch the fellow's head, whoever he may be ! Though it mayn't be a fellow, it's more likely a woman. Father Philip, who has been in the world a great deal, told me that women were naturally spiteful and liked to give each other pain ; *she's* not spiteful, I am positive ; she has a soul to match her face. I am afraid she is poor, travelling alone second-class, and her toilet really is shabby ; Millicent would not wear that dress, nor that straw bonnet with the faded ribbon. But the shawl is a first-rater, I should say, though I don't know much of woman's gear ; yet that has seen its best days. Evidently she is a lady, well born and cultured. How I *should* like to find out her name ; if we alighted together I would offer to look after her luggage."

And here Aubrey's reflections were suddenly disturbed by a tremendous oscillation of the carriage, which began to sway and jolt in most ominous fashion. He could scarcely keep his seat, and, looking towards his companion, he saw that she, too, looked at him with inquiring glance.

"I am afraid we are off the rail," he said, in reply to the mute inquiry. "Don't be afraid, I——"

The next moment they were both on the floor of the carriage, which seemed to be toppling over. Loud shrieks were heard from adjoining compartments, and immediately afterwards the train came to a standstill, and the imminent danger was over. Almost too quickly for Aubrey, who had instinctively folded his arms round the frightened girl, determined to shield her as far as possible from the results of any terrific concussion—though I must do the young man the justice to say that I think he would have been equally gallant had his fellow-passenger been old and ugly. It came naturally to Aubrey Seaton to render service to women, simply because they were women, for he cherished a chivalric feeling towards the whole sex, which, however, had scarcely yet been developed.

"I will try to get out," he said, struggling to his feet ; no easy task with the carriage tilted on one side, though not overturned, as were those nearer the engine. And, succeeding, he helped out his partner in distress, and

placed her on the sloping green bank of the cutting, while he went himself to the aid of those who were assisting the unlucky passengers in the foremost carriages, which were seriously injured. According to all rules of novel writing, Aubrey's heroine ought to have fainted and lain in his arms, unconscious and lovely—especially as fainting was rather fashionable thirty years ago. There is certainly more common sense among women than there used to be. But the girl did nothing of the kind; she grew deadly pale, yet she never lost her composure, and she did not scream, as many others in the train did, at the very top of their shrill voices, and for no very apparent reason, since those who were actually hurt made but little outcry.

It turned out that there was happily no loss of life or of limb; only two or three persons were at all injured, though most of the passengers were severely shaken, and some of them suffering from bruises and contusions. The engine, however, was entirely disabled, and the train had come to grief at a place where it was very difficult to obtain assistance—about half way between two stations. The great fear was lest the up express, which would soon be due, should advance before the signals could be turned against it; and Aubrey, who at once bethought him of the danger, returned to his late companion to beg her to leave the cutting for the field above, which was easily accessible. He helped her over the hurdles and into the midst of the green springing corn, and then he asked her if she was very much frightened.

"Yes, I was frightened," she said. "I was never in a railway accident before; but, thank God, we have escaped very well; it might have been far otherwise."

"Are you hurt at all?"

"I think not; though I have a battered sort of feeling, as if I had been beaten and shaken; and you?"

"Not a bit the worse. My arm and shoulder got an ugly bump or two against the sharp edge of the seat, and I dare say they will be stiff to-morrow; but there's nothing to complain of. You are sure you have sustained no injury?"

"Quite sure, thank you. But what is to become of us? We seem to be miles from any house."

"I fancy there is a house yonder; I see smoke rising from among the trees; for myself I am only bound for Lunechester, and I dare say I shall manage to get there somehow. I could walk it comfortably—it cannot be any distance."

"I dare say I could walk it too, for Lunechester is my destination; but I have my luggage; it is not very much, but much more than I can carry."

"It can be forwarded; if you will charge me with it, I will at once see the guard about it. I must go down and recover my own bag, if I can; I forgot all about it, as we scrambled out of the carriage. It is addressed—your luggage—of course?"

"Oh, yes, 'Miss Armstrong;'—I am Edith Armstrong; one large trunk and two smaller ones. I should not like to lose them, for they contain all my worldly possessions. If you would be so very kind."

"Edith," he whispered to himself as he leaped down the bank again. "The name matches the face, and what a sweet, soft voice she has! I am glad she did not scream like that middle-aged horror in the blue velvet bonnet."

The surly guard's temper was certainly improved by the accident, and he received Aubrey's inquiries about Miss Armstrong's luggage with striking amiability, which increased when he saw the traveller take out his purse and extract a coin which he doubted not would soon be transferred to his own palm.

"All right, sir," he answered, when Aubrey had explained; "I'll undertake to see the things safe into Lunechester Station, and in charge of the station-master some time this evening. The messenger has reached Lunechester by this time, and they'll soon send a special train, and help to clear the line."

"How far is it to Lunechester?"

"Scarcely four miles, sir, across the fields—right by that that church spire there; when you get on the Brow you will see the town lying at your feet. Some of the passengers are going to tramp it; the luggage will be safe enough; and the accident's not our fault—it's something wrong with the plates."

Miss Armstrong was quite willing to take the proposed walk, and she seemed rather impatient to set off.

"I hope our friends will not be anxious," said Aubrey; "we ought to be in Lunechester at this moment."

"Mine will not," returned the girl; "for I did not expect any one to meet me; in fact, I have no friends in the town; I have never seen the persons to whom I am going."

Aubrey perhaps looked his surprise, for Miss Armstrong continued—"I am a governess going to my first situation—that is all; I hope this misadventure may not be the beginning of disappointments. Not a very promising opening to a career, is it?"

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## CHAPTER VI.

THE REV. JOHN FABIAN.

"One by one the sects are breaking,  
Only Rome remains unshaking,  
Soon the world will nothingarian,  
—Or Papist be!"

MEANTIME certain persons pacing the station platform at Lunechester were beginning to be uneasy, as the train for which they waited delayed to make its appearance. Among those anxious loiterers was a tall, dark, handsome, aristocratic-looking personage, in the dress of a clergyman of the English Church. He was, I said, handsome—that is to say, he had fine regular features, a singularly dignified air, and clear pale olive complexion. But some people might have urged that there was something not quite ingenuous in the downcast gaze, something that implied a superabundance of caution and reserve, perhaps even a genius for intrigue. "Look at that tall man—the clergyman, I mean," said one gentleman to another; "what a splendid head, and what power there is in that face. That man might rule an empire; he has diplomacy at his fingers'



ends, and there is a patient persistency in his expression which shows me that he will gain his point even if he bide his time. What a pity he is a clergyman! he ought to have been a Cabinet minister, a professed politician."

"He may be a politician, though he be in holy orders," returned the other; "that man could no more keep his hands out of political affairs than a child could keep his gaze off a sweet-shop. But is he a clergyman of our own Church or a priest of Rome?"

"A priest of Rome! what makes you think of such a thing? It is precisely the dress which some of our pronounced Oxford clerics are just now affecting: this Oxford movement is making quite a stir in the religious world."

"And will make more! There is only a faint disturbance yet to what we shall have, mark my words. These Tractarians, Puseyites—poor Arnold used to call them '*Newmanites*'—are really and at heart Romanists, with this grave difference—that the Newmanites are Roman Catholics at Oxford instead of at Oscott."

"Ah! I remember; it was not long before his death that Arnold was speaking on this subject with all his wonderful force and point; and he remarked that the Newmanite, or Puseyite—call the renegade what you please—was a treacherous enemy; while the professed Romanist was a fair and open one. The Romanist, he said, was as a Frenchman in his own uniform and in his own battalion; the Puseyite as the Frenchman disguised in British regimentals, and holding a post in order to betray it. The one we might honour, though we had to fight him; the other we should *hang*! Is that fine fellow taking the platform at such long strides one of this obnoxious brigade, think you?"

"I fancy he is, though really I have no right to say so; I never saw the man before. He is evidently a gentleman, and, if I mistake not, has singularly pleasing and fascinating manners. He does not look like a Lunecestrian."

"He looks very much like a foreigner; that face is scarcely English. He is waiting for this dilatory down-train, as we are, I suppose."

"Yes; it is shamefully behind time; we ought to be at Ribbleton. Hark! what is the station-master saying?"

This official, who had been giving directions at one of the sidings, now came up to the platform, and the unknown cleric who had caused the discussion between the two friends was asking him sundry questions. The gentlemen drew near to have a share in the information. The foreign-looking cleric was speaking the purest English, without the slightest accent; he was, of course, inquiring what had occurred to delay the non-arriving train. The station-master told him "Yes; there had been an accident—the fault of a careless platelayer, he believed; it might have been a very serious affair. If the train had run a furlong or so further on the disaster would have occurred at one of the most dangerous spots on the line—on a high, steep embankment, down which the engine and carriages would probably have plunged into a deep, rocky dell, and the loss of life must have been terrible. As it was, no one was killed, and no one very seriously hurt; and a special train and an engine had just been despatched to the place, and in a quarter of an hour it would return. It was very awkward; it kept back the express, and set everything wrong all along the line."

The cleric looked very much concerned; he was expecting a young relative by the unlucky train, he observed, though he was not positively certain that he would travel by it. He hoped now he had chosen a later one, or he might come "over-sands," that being the way he had taken when leaving Luncester a week before.

By this time the two gentlemen, the dark cleric, the station-master, and one or two other persons, had closed up into a little group. A common trouble makes people informal and communicative, even friendly for the nonce.

"Your friend, sir, would scarcely cross the sands to-day," said the elder gentleman, who lived not far from Keirmouth; "the tides do not serve; it would be dangerous in the extreme to make the attempt, even with an experienced guide. And the guides themselves are always, in the end, drowned or lost in a quicksand. You may depend upon it, your friend would not be allowed to try the sands to-day."

"I am relieved to hear you say so," returned the cleric, with such lively suavity, and with an air of such high-bred courtesy, that the gentleman addressed at once felt the deepest interest in the stranger. "Still, it seems as if to-day the poor lad had only to choose between perils of the land and of the sea. I shall be heartily glad to behold him safe and sound."

"Your son, sir, I presume?"

"No, my nephew; nor actually that, being in point of fact only my second cousin. But he has always been to me as a son, and we adopted the relationship of uncle and nephew in his childhood as better suited to our disparity of years, and more in accordance with our mutual regard for each other."

"And here is the train. Now we shall hear particulars."

It was soon ascertained that the damage had been chiefly to the locomotive and the carriages, the passengers on the whole escaping wonderfully, though several were assisted out of an invalid carriage that had been despatched for their accommodation, looking very wan and shaken; and one lady, with a black eye and a swollen nose, had a pugilistic appearance, and there was a gentleman who limped on to the platform declaring that his ankle was dislocated. Most of the passengers for the South, however, were going on, as soon as a train could be properly made up; and the two gentlemen, who were bound for an evening meeting at Ribbleton, were imploring the official to hasten its departure, as they were now expected at the Town Hall.

But of course there was no Aubrey Seaton, and by this time it was half-past six o'clock. The clerical gentleman who awaited his coming looked decidedly uneasy. He went up to the station-master, and inquired when the next up-train would be due.

"Almost immediately, sir," was the answer; "though after what has happened one cannot say certainly; the up-trains have to run on the down-line till the rails are cleared. It was due at six; I dare say it will be in directly. We shall get right again in an hour or two."

"I will wait till this train comes in," murmured the cleric, as he took out his watch and compared it with the

station clock. "The saints grant that boy has not taken the 'over-sands' route! I have heard enough of the dangers of those sands in certain states of the tide. I wish I had commanded him to come by rail; an upset is less to be dreaded than a treacherous quicksand. Ha! the train is signalled, I see; here it comes—not so very late considering the blocking-up of the line. Now then for Master Aubrey!"

But in vain did the speaker glance into every carriage, as the train slowly glided past him. The face and form he looked for were nowhere to be seen. And the train had steamed out of the station again, and the arrivals—only two or three—had dispersed, before he could believe that again he was disappointed. "I *desired* him to come, so he would come," again murmured the cleric, as with an air of manifest concern he turned away; "the boy is as obedient as when he was ten years old, and I worded my summons urgently enough. Surely the fools would not let him ride 'over-sands'?"

The next train from the North was not due till eleven o'clock, therefore it was useless lingering any longer in that dreary station, where he had already spent two hours and a half. He turned to depart, when a young, fresh voice, close to him, cried, "Here you are, Father! something told me I should find you here."

"Aubrey! where have you sprung from? Were you rash enough to dare those dreadful sands?"

"No, no, Father! I knew they were impassable to-day. I rode to Farleton and caught the four o'clock train, which came to grief this side of Kiermouth, as I dare say you know by this time. Then, as I had only a saddle-bag, I thought I would walk the rest of the way. I heard of a short cut across the fields; but, as is generally the case with 'short cuts,' it proved much longer than was expected. However, here I am, Father, all safe and sound, our Lady be thanked; not a scratch have I, only a bump or two on elbow and shoulder, and just a little stiffness."

"The blessed saints be praised, Aubrey! You have had a narrow escape. Had the train gone a little further there would have been small chance for any of you. Now, then,

let us be off; you must want some supper, after all your shocks and fatigues."

"That I do, Father," replied Aubrey, who was blessed with a very healthy appetite; "but first I must speak to the station-master about some luggage that was to come on here."

"Ah! did you bring any heavy luggage?"

"No; it is not my own. I promised my fellow-traveller—a lady with whom I scrambled out of the overturned carriage—that I would inquire for it, and order it to be sent to her address in the town. She walked with me; half a dozen people walked, for no one knew how long a train might be in coming to pick us up. Of course I saw her safe to the house where she was going to stay; and I came on here, to look after her traps, also feeling certain I should stumble upon you, my Father."

"Hush! don't call me 'Father' here. I am the Rev. John Fabian, a priest of the Anglican Church—of advanced views—you understand?"

"What shall I call you, then, Father?"

"Call me 'uncle.' I have said that you are my nephew—that is what you were at St. Omer, you know; what, in fact, you have always been to me, apart from our spiritual relations. Now, then; my boy, about this luggage?"

The question of the luggage was very quickly settled; the guard had been as good as his word; Miss Armstrong's trunks were standing ready to be claimed. Aubrey took out that young lady's card, with her present address legibly written upon it—"Mrs. Augustus Jevons, Almira House, Burnthorpe-road, Lunechester." A porter was immediately despatched to Almira House, and Aubrey's mission was fulfilled. Father Fabian—or the Rev. John Fabian, which you please—made no remark, but he took a note of the circumstance. It was a fundamental principle of his to take notes of everything that occurred, and to inform himself of all details and particulars; he quite believed that

"Trifles make the sum of human things,"

though not precisely in the spirit of the words as written by worthy Mrs. Hannah More. He combined the tact and

acumen of a Queen's Counsel with the skill of a practised detective; therefore he never overlooked seeming trivialities.

Aubrey was naturally taking the turn which led to the inn where he had lodged before; but Father Fabian, turning in an opposite direction, took him up a steep bye-street, which soon brought them on to the hill on which stands Lunechester's "embattled pile."

"This is the Castle Hill, sir, is it not?" said Aubrey, rather surprised, and not quite certain, for it was growing dark.

"Yes, my son. As we have private business of so much importance, I deemed it prudent to seek quarters where we should be secure from prying observation. One never knows whom one may encounter at a public inn. You remember, perhaps, an old domestic of my mother's—Mam-sell Annette, as we used to call her? Of course you do; she was very fond of you when you were a child. I remember her giving you chicken *rissoles* and buttered eggs, when I had sentenced you to bread and water for your bad behaviour! Well, Mam-sell Annette married an Englishman some years ago, when she was, as people imagined, a confirmed spinster. It was a most unhappy marriage, and her husband left her, and went to America. Whether he is now dead or not I cannot say, for she does not know herself; but he certainly married another woman in Louisiana, and she in consequence has repudiated his name, and calls herself Mademoiselle Annette again. She does a little quiet millinery for the best families here, and lets lodgings; and it is to her house we are going. We may hatch a State conspiracy there without fear of espial. Annette is one of the cleverest and most useful women I know, and withal a good Catholic! She will have your room and your supper ready, and be very glad to see you once more."

"Why did you not send me to her when I came into the North a week ago?"

"I judged it better that you should go to Seaton Hall from a well-known, respectable inn. Everything, however, is altered since then."

"Everything! Were you not astonished, Father?"

"I have learned to be astonished at nothing, my son. But you shall be rested, and have broken your fast, before we go into particulars. This is the house."

It was a gloomy old tenement, standing in a corner, many-roomed but not spacious, old and even ruinous, without being in the least venerable; the heavy-framed windows were set in massive stones; the ledges were ponderous; the panes of glass small and dingy. The front door might have admitted Goliath, or any of the sons of Anak; and the knocker was of such primitive manufacture that it might have been used by John of Gaunt, who once resided in the immediate neighbourhood. A more dismal-looking abode could scarcely be imagined; it was not wonderful that Mademoiselle Annette never rejoiced in many lodgers; but then she professed to be "very particular," and she made a point of never harbouring heretics. She was so good a Catholic that she would have sworn that black was white, if only commanded to do so by her spiritual directors, and she held that it was lawful to make use of any means for the advancement of her Church.

She received Aubrey with effusion. She was a middle-aged woman, probably looking older than she was; she was every inch a Frenchwoman—dark-eyed, dark-skinned, shrugging her once graceful shoulders, and gesticulating as she talked. Her face showed her to be keen-witted, shrewd, and cautious, yet daring. If ever a female Jesuit figured in real life Mademoiselle Annette was one! She led the two gentlemen to a good-sized room on the first floor, "giving," as she would have said, on some leads, where in summer time bloomed a little garden, and where on winter nights the cats of the neighbourhood delighted to hold high festival.

There was a bright fire burning, for April evenings are chilly; crimson curtains were drawn before the two high narrow windows, and the table was set ready for a meal; and in less than a quarter of an hour a *recherché* little supper was served, to which both gentlemen did ample justice. The cloth withdrawn, they adjourned to a smaller room, fitted up as an oratory, where Annette joined them; and then Father Fabian mumbled at full speed certain

Latin prayers, crossing himself repeatedly, and finishing up with a *Benediction*, which closed the service.

"Now, then, Aubrey," said the priest, "let us come to business; is the little heretic alive?"

"I believe so, and likely to live; all the gossips are singing her praises, as one of the finest and healthiest babies that ever came into this miserable world. If it had not been for the mother's death, I believe, all the Dalespeople and all the folk for twenty miles round would have sung a solemn *Te Deum* for the welcome Protestant heiress!"

"I wish you had been a day or two earlier, though I do not know that it would have made much difference. I suppose you have heard of *supposititious children*?"

"Well, yes; I have, but I am not quite clear what sort of children they are. You don't mean that you would question this child's legitimacy?"

"Can't, unfortunately! I might sooner hope to change the dynasty than to upset the validity of the marriage of General William Seaton with Mary Damarel. But are you sure—is any one sure—that she *is* Mary Seaton's child?"

"There cannot be a doubt, not a shadow of a doubt! all the people about knew what was expected. The Duchess of Aldinghame engaged the nurse, and the curate's wife, Mrs. Clifford, was present, and then there were the two doctors—Dr. Wilson, of Chalfonts, a most respectable man, whose word would be taken as his oath; and another,—I forget his name, a well-known practising surgeon from St. Ulpha's, and the *accoucheur* of the whole county. Besides, the poor lady died!"

"She might have died without being a mother; I knew a case—but I won't go into that now. I suppose that card *cannot* be played without losing the game at once, and hopelessly. I just thought it possible that the General and his wife, in their blind hatred of our holy religion, and their dread of a Catholic successor, and, considering their advanced age, might have meditated a 'pious fraud,' and agreed between themselves that at a certain period an heir to the estates *should be* presented to the tenants as their own new-born child!"

"My uncle is incapable of anything of the kind," re-



turned Aubrey, half angrily; "no Seaton that ever breathed would devise so infamous a scheme!"

"The temptation must have been very strong."

"I deny it! I feel assured that during the years of their childless estate no such vile thought ever occurred to either of them. My uncle's case is rare, but not quite exceptional; men do sometimes have children born to them late in life. It won't do, Father Fabian: that little babe at Seaton is my uncle's own child, and his veritable heiress; two patent facts which nobody has dreamed of doubting, much less disputing."

"Calm yourself, my son, and have patience. Remember, I have not been on the spot as you have; the gossips have not chattered in my presence. At any rate, will you do me the justice to own that the child's birth was an event that one scarcely would have looked for?"

"I believe no one was more surprised than the parents themselves; and, as I observed, the whole neighbourhood rejoices in the 'Protestant heiress'! The words were always ringing in my ears."

"There must be no Protestant heiress."

"What *do* you mean?" cried Aubrey, in horror. "Surely in your zeal for the true faith you would not countenance any plot against the innocent child?"

"Pshaw! Do you take me for a monster or an idiot, Master Aubrey? Upon my word, Seatondale has done something for you! You went there a half-fledged strippling, and you come back a saucy and remarkably self-opinionated young man. No, don't stop to apologise; I can make allowance for youthful enthusiasm and boyish inexperience. Listen to me, Aubrey. This is no child's play, though a child has so much to do with it. The Seatondale inheritance *must* come back to the old faith. I have private letters from Rome entrusting to me certain affairs. We have lost ground in the North, which once was so fully with us; our holy religion must again prevail in England; his Holiness must once more hold sway over the hierarchy of this country. Great things are in contemplation—I need not tell you that a mighty movement has already commenced, but the work will have to grow and grow in secret till the time is ripe. Meanwhile you and I

and all the faithful have, in all we undertake, one steadfast aim in view—the triumph of the Church Catholic and the glory of God.”

“I am ready and willing, Father, to play my part. God knows I desire nothing more than to see the old religion once more established in this land—to see my England rescued from the heresy which has for three centuries been her crowning sin. Oh! it will be a glorious day when once more the Mass is offered on every altar in this country! But will it be in my day?”

“It will, if you and the Catholic youth—your contemporaries of both sexes—are ardent, valiant, devoted, *obedient!* Nothing can be done without implicit and unquestioning obedience; no battle was ever gained by an undisciplined army. The commander issues his orders, his officers carry them into execution, through the soldiers, who, though they gain the victory, simply obey the word of command. If *they* hesitated, if they dared to reason, to ask the how and the why of their leaders, the day would be *lost*. We are the soldiers of the Cross, Aubrey; we must fight valiantly; we must obey unconditionally, and remember, in the army are many ranks and various employments. There is the band that has only to make a noise; there are the recruiting sergeants, whose duty it is to enlist, at all cost, as many young soldiers as possible; there are field marshals and generals, *aides-de-camp*; there are horse regiments and foot regiments, sharp-shooters; and last, not least, *sappers and miners*. These do their work out of sight, but it is not less honourable than the work of those who lead and follow in some magnificent attack. I think I have said enough; my pupil has not now to learn the first principles of true Catholicism.”

“Father, no truer Catholic than I ever drew breath. I love my religion better than I love my life, and had I some day succeeded to the Seatondale estates, you would have seen how deeply I have the cause of my holy faith at heart.”

“I believe you, my dear son! But though Seatondale for the present, at least, is lost to you, it must not be lost to our holy Church a day longer than is necessary. That little child must be reared in the true faith. I am not

hopeless about the General; this Oxford movement is largely in our favour, and he is what is called a *sound Churchman*—the very best material out of which to make a sound Catholic.”

“What are your plans, my Father?”

“They are not yet formed. Till within the last four days I have always anticipated your reign at Seatondale. The General is getting old, and his military life aged him considerably. Your father would never have left Southerleigh; he intended, if he survived his brother, to cede all power to you in the North. Seatondale would have been actually though not legally yours the moment the breath went out of the General’s body. Our plans now have to be entirely re-formed, and I have laid the affair before my superiors; only for the present I am a clergyman of the Established Church. I have looked in the Clergy List, and find that there are or have been Fabians at both Universities, and two *John* Fabians at Oxford. I shall probably take up my residence somewhere in Seatondale. There is a Dominican at St. Ulpha’s in whom I can repose trust. Now let us separate: you look woefully tired, and no wonder. To-morrow, after I have seen some one here, we will return to Chalfonts. You have not mentioned ‘Father Fabian,’ I trust?”

“I am almost afraid I have, though only incidentally. I think I spoke of you to Mr. Clifford as having encouraged me to study the Prayer-book of the English Church.”

“That is awkward. But it can be managed; there may be Romish as well as Protestant or rather Anglo-Catholic Fabians. I need not be identified with your late preceptor. Bless you, my dear son; the Mother of God and all saints and holy angels keep and guard you. Good night.”

## CHAPTER VII.

## "WHAT OF DISSENT?"

"Say, is it wise,  
Or right, or safe, for some chance good to-day,  
To dare the vengeance of to-morrow's skies?  
Be wiser, thou dear land, my native home;  
Do always good; do good that good may come.  
The path of duty plain before thee lies:  
Break, break the spells of the enchantress Rome!"

THE funeral of Mrs. Seaton did not take place till the tenth day after her decease. She was buried at Chalfonts, in the old family vault of the Seatons, which had not been opened since the interment of Francis Seaton, whom the Southerley Seatons surnamed "the Apostate," and who was the grandfather of the General, and, as you will remember, the first Protestant of his ancient house. It was a gloomy April afternoon, when they bore to her last resting-place, with all due pomp and solemnity, the mortal remains of gentle Mary Seaton.

A bitter blast from the north-east swept over the face of the whole country; the arch of heaven, erewhile so blue and ringing with the lark's sweet carol, was now grey and silent. Grey looked the desolate, cold moorland; grey was the lonely, wave-washed shore; and grey the restless waters of the Bay, as in measured cadence they rose and fell with the in-coming tide. Darkly frowned the mountains; black, scarred, and jagged they rose under the pale, livid light of that leaden, sunless sky—those mighty fastnesses of the everlasting hills. Like a weird, awful phantom stood the far-off giant Ingleborough; and Earnseat, on the other side of the Channel, with his funereal pines, seemed keeping watch and ward over the mournful procession that wound its way across the upland moors from Seatondale.

At the head of the town—at the Thurston Arms, in fact—the long file of carriages stopped, and the mourners

one and all alighted. The coffin was taken from the hearse, and, according to an ancient custom, borne on the shoulders of the Seatondale statesmen to the church. Darker grew the day as they carried Mary Seaton down the quiet, hilly street where she had so often walked. Every house was closed, every face was sad, and from the grand old Priory Tower rang out a muffled, reverberating peal. Following the coffin walked the solitary mourner, till, as they neared the churchyard gate, two gentlemen in deep mourning approached, and quietly filed in at some little distance behind the General. All the Chalfonts people, and all the Seatondale folk too, knew well who these gentlemen were; only the General himself was unaware of the presence of the disinherited heir.

Then the muffled peal ceased, dying away in low, hollow murmurs among the fells, and the great bell struck up its mournful toll; while the long procession, slowly winding down towards the Priory Church, began to sing in a low, minor key, the hymn—

“O God, our help in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come;  
Our shelter from the stormy blast,  
And our eternal home.”

At the lych-gate they were met by Dr. Redmayne, in his white surplice, with the customary greeting of the English Church—“I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.” And the bearers, following the rector, entered the church, bearing the coffin along the damp, mouldering nave, between the matchless clustered pillars; past the ancient font, into the magnificent choir, with all its carven splendours; past the marriage altar and the table of the Lord; past all of these, for she whom the sweeping velvet pall and the heavy coffin-lid covered from sight had gone

“Where none may need  
Temple, or shrine, or saintly creed.”

And so they placed her in the gloomy, low-browed vault, side by side with Francis Seaton, who had lain there peacefully enough for almost ninety years. Strangely

looked the living faces crowded together in that dark house of death, and strangely glittered the lustrous silver ornaments on the lady's coffin, as the taper's light fell upon them; while those on Francis Seaton's were tarnished and blackened with the lapse of little less than a century, and the velvet, all mildewed and decayed, was dropping from the solid oak and massive lead. There were other coffins, too, in which lay the dust and ashes of other and older Seatons, but all were perishing in the death-cold darkness of that mournful vault. It was a dreary, dismal, hopeless-looking place, and Aubrey, though he had never seen the poor lady who had done him so ill a turn, wished they had laid her under the green, fragrant turf, on which the sweet summer sunshine and the pure white winter snows might rest, from which flowers might spring and bloom, and on which the moon and the stars, far in their purple heaven, might look down and smile. That gloomy burial-place of his ancestors struck a chill to his very heart; it seemed to him as if there at least death was the conqueror, and the faith in which he had been so carefully reared had nothing to say to cheer him, for dark across the awful gulf gleamed the "cleansing fires of purgatory;" and besides, these of the later day, his great-grandfather and the lady of Seatondale, were *heretics*. They held not the Catholic faith, "which except a man believe faithfully and steadfastly, he cannot be saved;" nay, more, "without doubt he shall perish everlastingly!" He began to murmur to himself the "Litany for the Dead," shutting out as far as he could the words of the Protestant service. And this was what Aubrey Seaton said silently while that other voice was saying, "We meekly beseech Thee, O Father, to raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness, that, when we shall depart this life, we may rest in Him, as our hope is this our sister doth; and that at the general resurrection in the last day we may be found acceptable in Thy sight, and receive that blessing which Thy well-beloved Son shall then pronounce to all that love and fear Thee, saying, Come, ye blessed children of My Father; receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world." This was what the young man reverently uttered—

“‘Lord, have mercy upon us!’

“‘Christ, have mercy upon us!’

“‘Lord, have mercy upon us!’

“‘Jesus, receive our prayers!’

“‘Lord Jesus, grant our petitions!’

“‘Oh, God the Father, Creator of the world, *have mercy on the souls of the faithful departed!*’”

But these “departed” were not of the *faithful*! He stopped with a gasp, for all the invocations of that litany were for the *souls of the faithful*.

“‘Give rest to the souls of the faithful departed!’

“‘Give eternal rest to the souls of the faithful departed!’”

It was in vain that he prayed for those who had died outside the fold: for them there was no more repentance, no more hope. And so he turned to another litany of his Church, that “for the conversion of England.” “‘That it may please Thee to hasten the conversion of this our miserable country, and reunite it to the ancient faith and communion of our Church. *We beseech Thee to hear us!* That it may please Thee to enlighten the hearts of all schismatics, who live out of the Church, seriously to apprehend the danger of their state, and the great importance of eternal salvation. *We beseech Thee to hear us!*’”

And then the service was over, the blessing of peace was spoken, and all was still. Some turned at once and left the vault, but the General, Mr. Clifford, and a few others lingered. Aubrey looked at his uncle as he stood with clasped hands and bowed head beside the coffin which contained all that was mortal of his dearly loved wife, taking his long, last, wordless farewell of what had been most precious to his heart. It was a noble face on which the young man gazed, stern perhaps in its lineaments, but yet sadly tender in that moment of supreme sorrow. He looked older than his years, his bearing even then and there was soldierly, and there was something in the anguished, tearless countenance that deeply touched his unknown nephew, who gazed upon him from a shadowed recess, himself unseen, unnoticed.

“It must be very hard,” thought the youth, “to lose the woman one loves so well, the wife of many happy years;

the mother of one's child. Oh, my poor uncle, I would comfort you if I could. Would that you were of the true faith, safely gathered in to the bosom of our holy Church! Surely, surely he may yet be won. And his little child, she *must* be taught to abhor the sin of schism, and to dread the doom of heretics. Father Fabian is right, this our ancient inheritance must return to the allegiance of Rome."

And meanwhile Father Fabian keenly watched his pupil. It was the first time Aubrey had ever been present during any Protestant rite, and he wondered what effect it would have upon him. When all was over and they were in the open air once more, he asked him what he thought of it. Aubrey reflected a moment, for he had not quite made up his mind respecting the merits of this heretical service; he answered, slowly: "On the whole, Father, I cannot say I dislike it. There was something quietly impressive in those words, 'I am the Resurrection and the Life.' 'I know that my Redeemer liveth.' And then those verses that were read in the church—what a grand old church it is, Father!—I mean, 'For now is Christ risen,' and the rest. It was something like the *Dies Iræ*, 'In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed;' and also, 'Oh death, where is thy sting? Oh grave, where is thy victory?' It was from the sacred Scriptures, was it not, my Father?"

"From the Scriptures? yes, so to speak, but from an unauthorised version, remember! Never forget that the English translation of the Bible is not to be depended on, the heretics have so rendered it as to serve their own purposes, you may be sure. Also the mysteries of Holy Writ are too deep for the secular mind to receive; the only safe way is to rely implicitly on the interpretations of the Church."

"Is there so very much difference, Father, between our translation and that of these heretics?"

"Sufficient difference to render promiscuous readings highly dangerous; sufficient to cause peril to the faithful soul. But let me caution you, Aubrey, to drop the title



'*Father.*' If once you pronounce that word, as addressed to me, or as in reference to me, in the hearing of any third person, *all is lost!* Call me always—in our most private moments, even—'Uncle Fabian.' Your friend, the curate, seems to be a good, easy-going fellow, not overburdened with any extreme sense of the responsibility of his office, but not without a pretty strong idea of sacerdotal importance. It will not be difficult to interest him in the Oxford movement, I imagine."

"Do you sympathise with that Anglican movement, my—Uncle Fabian?"

"I despise it to my heart's core! The fools! to think they can set up a Catholicism of their own, unreconciled as they are to the Holy Father. But let them have their whim, encourage them to the top of their bent, for they are on the high road to Rome, whether they know it or not. They are willing and ready to compromise themselves and their errant Church in a hundred ways; we of the true Church, as you know, make no compromises—they must come to us, not we to them."

"And they *will* come. It is only a question of time. It seems to me that the Church of England is a good soil in which to sow the seeds of what she herself, in her sublime ignorance, calls '*Poper*y.'"

"It has been a barren soil enough for the last three centuries. But now, I trust, the clods are broken up; this Tractarianism, which the Evangelicals style '*semi-Romanism*,' is ploughing and harrowing the land from end to end. Yes, it will be a fertile soil ere long; but the seed will have to be sown with discretion. And at present, if one cannot sow the finest of the wheat, why, one must be content with tares and vetches. Anything is better than the thorns and thistles of a rampant Protestantism."

"I do not quite comprehend."

"See you here, Aubrey. No great work was ever done hastily. Nature and art alike are slow in all their processes; no grand masterpiece was ever perfected in raw haste. Look around you at these steadfast hills, at those worn cliffs, at yonder bay and estuary! are they, as we now see them, the creation of a day? Look even at that field of green springing corn; and was the seed sown

yesterday? Let us copy the patient earth, that works tirelessly, and silently, and out of sight. We cannot, as things are, preach a crusade against heresy—it would be vain as inexpedient; but we can make use of this schismatic, self-complacent, arrogant Church of England; we can defer to her prejudices, humour her conceits, sympathise with her movements; she shall learn our lessons, while she thinks she is conning her own ritual; she shall imbibe our dogmas, while she fondly imagines she is but developing her own Anglican theories. She shall be one with us, while she knows it not; she shall work with us, and intrigue with us, on her own account, as it seems to her, till the time is ripe. Then will the mother put forth her authority, and bind the daughter to herself; then England shall be Catholic once more."

"But all that is in the far distance, I fear."

"Heathen Rome was not built in a day; Christian Rome cannot win back her ancient power and dominion in these realms with a mere bluster of words, or even by simple proclamation of her rights. You plant a gourd, and it springs up in a night to fade as quickly. You drop an acorn, and it does not germinate till many days and nights are past; and he who sowed the seed dies while the oak is but a stripling. One generation succeeds another, dynasties are overthrown, customs changed, and knowledge is increased, and still the oak flourishes where it was planted, a grand and glorious tree, the monarch of the woods. Which will you have? The frail, speedy gourd, or the tardy, enduring, kingly oak? At least, you can read my parable?"

"I do. We must work and wait; we must do our part, at all events. We must plant the vineyard, even though the grapes ripen too late for our enjoyment."

"Exactly! And your work at present is obedience, simple, unwavering obedience, my dear Aubrey, to those who are the leaders in this great army, who fight for the true faith. Do nothing on your own responsibility; you are young, rash, and impetuous, though not more so than other youths. Submit yourself with perfect confidence to your spiritual directors, and never, under any circumstances, question their decisions. Your confessor is your

conscience, in all which concerns our holy Church. Surrender your own judgment when it clashes with his; in short, believe that black is white, and that night is day, if he tells you so. I cannot speak more plainly, I will not speak less frankly, for our task is a momentous one—yours and mine. This heiress—if she lives—must grow up a devout Catholic. Catholicism must hold sway in Seaton-dale, as it does at Southerleigh.”

“Has this spirit of what you call *Tractarianism* largely permeated the Established Church of England, Uncle Fabian?”

“More largely than is generally believed; but it will grow and *grow*. It is firmly rooted, that is one comfort, and vain will be the efforts of those who toil for its extirpation. In thirty years—mark my words, young man—the English Church will be ashamed to call itself Protestant. There will be exceptions, of course; but they will not be many; as for the ‘Evangelicals,’ as they stupidly style themselves, their days are numbered; their glory is departed. As the elder generation dies out, so will perish the sect called ‘Evangelical.’ In the year 1870 the High Church—far higher than we can now conceive it—will be in the ascendancy. Tractarianism, Puseyism, Anglicanism—whatever you choose to call it—will have a grand majority; out of fifty Evangelical communities as they exist to-day, one or two may weakly survive—a remnant rather of the past than an augury of the future. Evangelicalism, in all its degrees, will be quietly but surely absorbed into Anglicanism, and Anglicanism is the bud which, carefully fostered and tended, will expand into the full-blown flower of Catholicism.”

Aubrey’s young face glowed. He longed for the day of his Church’s triumph; he devoutly believed in the accomplishment of Father Fabian’s prophecy. Like the Jews of Palestine who wait for the restoration of their ancient shrine, so Aubrey’s inmost heart cried, “Build Thou the walls of Zion, in this our day—even in this, our day, O Lord!” Only by Zion he, of course, meant spiritual Rome. And the domination of Rome and the salvation of England were to him synonymous.

It is all very well to sneer and mock at the Romanist’s

credulity and senseless bigotry; only the mockers never seem to remember how from babyhood the Papist is trained in all the mysteries of his religion; how he sucks in, almost with his mother's milk, the traditions and dogmas of his Church; nor how absolute is the bondage which, at least in youth, when all impressions are strongest and most abiding, enslaves him, body, intellect, and soul. Aubrey Seaton would as soon have doubted the teaching and the decrees of his Church as you and I would doubt the love and mercy of the eternal Father, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, or the life-giving influences of the Holy Spirit!

"But," said he, after a few moments' reflection, "what of *Dissent*?"

"Dissent must be crushed! Yes! *crushed*, I say," savagely replied the priest. "One cannot deal with Dissenters as such: there is no one point of union between Dissent and true Catholicism. They have no ritual, no sacraments, no creed; there is literally nothing in their worship, nor in their faith—their *unfaith* rather—for us to work upon! You may convert Pagans by the thousand, Anglicans by the score, even now—by the hundred presently; from the Evangelical party we gather recruits occasionally; but no man or woman has ever walked straight out of the ranks of Nonconformity into ours; and none ever will."

"Well, then, we must make these Dissenters 'Churchmen,' as I believe the members of the English Establishment audaciously presume to call themselves! The Church of England is our half-way house; is it not so?"

"The Anglican Church of England is. I don't know that the Evangelicals are at all useful to us; an ultra-Protestantism is a primary essential with them, and they fight against us tooth and claw; with more goodwill than with judgment, I must say. Still, there is far more hope of the most Evangelical of the Evangelicals than of a very moderate Dissenter. There is so much to go upon in the Church of England; we have certain dogmas and doctrines in common. Who shall say where consubstantiation ends and where transubstantiation commences? The Dissenters, in their shocking blasphemy, declare that the bread used

in communion is simply bread, and the wine merely wine, from first to last; that it is no more sacred than any other bread and wine taken at a common meal; that the *intention* lies not with the priest, but with the communicant; and that Christ is no more present in the holy Eucharist than in any other religious service or personal act of devotion. In short, every man is his own priest, and transacts his own business with God, without intervention of the clergy."

"How horrible! But they have clergy—a sort of clergy—have they not?"

"Oh, yes; but they have no orders, no hierarchy. Their *pastors*—that is the right term—teach them and lead their devotions as a rule; but even to these pastors they render no obedience: they hold precious as the apple of the eye the right of private judgment. And, strange to say, their very lack of prescription and uniformity seems to be productive of actual union among themselves."

"Are there many Nonconformists in England?"

"A vast number. And, however they may differ among themselves, they agree in this—that Catholicism, under any guise—'*Romanism*' they would say—is to be dreaded, shunned, and yet firmly grappled with! England's conversion would be inevitable but for these pestilent Dissenters, who wield a certain power, the secret of which they themselves only understand."

"Are they opposed to the Church of England?"

"They are,—and they are not. The amount of their opposition depends largely on what sort of Church it is with which they are brought into contact; for, after all, this boasted Church of England is really only a collection of *sects*, owning a common Liturgy, and banded together, in spite of the most singular incongruities, and of a deepening antagonism, by Act of Parliament. Dissenters and Evangelicals get on very well together, I am told; I cannot speak from personal observation, I know so little of the heresies of either, and the two can make common cause most alarmingly if they choose; but Dissent and Anglicanism will never stable their steeds together—no, not for an hour! In short, Dissent is the stumbling-block in the way of Catholicism in any form; and what is to be done

with this lowest, most abhorrent type of heresy, I really do not know. However, we are wandering from our text; we have not to deal with Dissenters here, I am thankful to say. There are a few ignorant, vulgar Methodists about, but I do not anticipate any trouble from them. I am glad we have had this conversation, for I wished you to view our position precisely as it stands. You must write to the General to-night; I will dictate the letter, so you need not concern yourself about what you will say, or leave unsaid. He is half-way home by this time, I suppose?"

"Poor man, yes, to his desolate home. He has paid dearly for his long-desired Protestant heir. I wish the baby's mother had lived, it would have made no difference to us now."

"Would it not? It would have made an immense difference. Mrs. Seaton is well out of our way, a mother's eyes are so keen. She would have disconcerted us at every turn; besides, she would probably have kept the child very much in her own hands, and under her own supervision. As it is, we will undertake to provide the heiress with nurses and governesses."

"How will you do that, sir?"

"Quite easily. I shall take counsel with your Mr. Clifford. I think we may be of mutual service to each other, he and I. I intend to be the General's very good friend, and his chief companion. There is one thing I wish I could have prevented. I hear the baby is to have a wet-nurse."

"Why should you wish to prevent that, Uncle Fabian? I really don't understand the mysteries of wet-nursing or dry-nursing; but I suppose it is just the question whether the poor little thing should be nourished by a woman or by a cow."

"That is just it, for I should have preferred the quadruped. A foster-mother is often as jealous of interference with and as passionately devoted to her charge, as if she were the actual parent. We come upon the stage too late, or I might have found, perhaps, the very foster-mother that is needed. When a nursery-governess is required, Mademoiselle Annette will be ready."

And meanwhile, the mourning father of the little baby,

whose future was thus discussed, went home with a heart heavy with a sorrow that seemed greater than he could bear. He had never seen the child since Mrs. Clifford had taken her from her dying mother's arms; and when the nurse, who was to stay there two months—for she had been engaged for so long—as the baby's principal attendant, asked him on the evening of the funeral, if he would not see "the poor little dear," he peremptorily declined. But when he was left alone by his solitary hearth, he made his moan, "Oh, Mary, my Mary! would God I had died with thee, my Mary!" Of the motherless babe he could not bear to think.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE GENERAL'S INVITATION.

"Ah, what a tangled web we weave  
When first we practise to deceive."

AUBREY wrote his letter to the General, at Father Fabian's dictation. It was a very nice letter, and beautifully expressed, only there were some things in it so utterly untrue that the young man paused once or twice and laid down his pen, and began to frame an expostulation. But a moment's thought convinced him of the futility of any such proceeding, and he wrote on submissively, though far from satisfied. Aubrey was naturally ingenuous, and had a strong sense of honour, or rather he might have had if he had been educated differently. A Jesuits' seminary is not precisely the place in which to imbibe habits of strict integrity, and "*noblesse oblige*" is a maxim not easily inculcated within its precincts. Nevertheless, the letter troubled Aubrey, and his director perceived his hesitation.

"You object to a few of the phrases?" he asked, not unkindly.

"They are not *facts*," returned Aubrey, earnestly, and colouring up like a bashful girl. "Can it be well to say that which must mislead—in short, to *pen a lie*?"

"My dear Aubrey, no one holds lying in more detestation than myself; lying, *per se*, is one of the seven deadly sins, as you are well aware; but it is necessary sometimes to make certain representations, which shall tend to certain greatly-to-be-desired issues. What is not strictly fact to-day may be so to-morrow; the seemingly false statement is, therefore, true by anticipation. Besides, the responsibility is mine; you are simply my mouthpiece; you have nothing to accuse yourself of. It is your duty to obey, and trust the good faith of one who commands with authority. You know you have sworn to obey me!"

"I have, and I will obey you, Uncle Fabian; only do not be angry. I mean no affront to yourself; but I pray you do not require from me what my conscience disallows."

"I am your conscience, and I absolve you from all sins which you may imagine you commit in the discharge of duties imposed upon you by your superiors. Now then, proceed."

With a sigh Aubrey resumed his pen, and finished his epistle and signed his name. He would not have lied to save his own life; but he could, would, and should lie to serve the interests of his Church. He put away his writing materials, and walked out into the cool air to try and calm the fever of his mind. The east wind swept down icily from the Fellshire hills; but he walked on facing the blast, scarcely heeding its keenness, so sore was the strife which raged within. Never before, in his young life, had such doubting, such questioning arisen. Was it the heretical atmosphere which he breathed just now? What was it that made him feel so cramped and fettered, so discontented, so scornful of himself? And then, as some country people passed by, he heard them name Keirmonth, and that took him back to the day of the railway accident, and naturally he thought again of Edith Armstrong. Indeed, if the whole truth must be spoken, he had been thinking of her continually, ever since he left her at the gates of Almira House. And now his thought was, "What would



*she* think of speaking or writing untruths, that the truth of all truths might be advanced?" Something told him that lying for any purpose would be abhorrent to that beautiful, pensive girl who had walked with him in the soft April twilight across the fields to Luncechester.

And yet what was the girl to him? She was certainly a heretic: her conversation had somehow betrayed *that* fact, though she had revealed little if anything of her history and belongings. Then, he might never see her again; if he trusted to the chapter of accidents a future meeting was most improbable. He did not believe in the charming *con-  
tretemps* of novel-writers, who are constantly bringing lovers together on all sorts of pretences, though, for the matter of that, truth is stranger than fiction, and there are episodes in some lives so startling that one dare not tell the story in print, because of its excessive improbability. And even if he did meet Edith Armstrong, what would come of it? What could he propose to himself if he sought her out, under the eye of Mrs. Augustus Jevons? Servant-maids were seldom allowed "followers," and would governesses be permitted to receive dubious attentions? Aubrey was a very whole-hearted young fellow, in spite of his Jesuit preceptors; he absolutely did not know what flirtation meant; and he said to himself very seriously, as he stood gazing across the faintly gleaming, restless waters: "I have no right to interfere with her in any way. I should be a scamp if I disturbed her, or got her into any sort of scrape. There is only one thing that could justify me in seeking her, and that would be the intent to make her my wife. And why should I not choose my wife? They tell me I am to marry and continue the line of Seatons, and if I don't nobody else can, for I am the last direct male heir, unless the poor General should marry again, which is most unlikely; and if he only has children at intervals of thirty years or so, he will scarcely live to welcome another. Besides, I prefer to marry; there are celibates enough in our family. And if I am to marry, is it not time I thought a little about it? I am twenty-two now, and a couple of years might elapse before I claimed my bride; there is nothing imprudent in marrying at four-and-twenty. On one thing I am resolved: I will choose my

own wife ; no power on earth, spiritual or temporal, shall choose her for me. I believe, in spite of my two-and-twenty years, I was little more than a boy till the other day. At this moment I feel that I am a man and a Seaton ! How I wish I could have dealt openly with my uncle ! It is a shame that one Seaton should deceive another. But then he is a heretic ; and the Church says—at least, Father Fabian says—that one cannot keep faith with heretics as one would with men of the true faith. It may be so ; it is so, of course ; and with all my heart I desire to see our ancient religion dominant once more over these ancestral lands of mine—of the Seatons rather—but I do wish one might fight openly and in the clear light of day. Covert warfare is not my *métier*, that is certain ; I am brave enough, I hope, to lead a forlorn hope. I wouldn't mind being the foremost on the walls of a besieged city, but I never could enlist with the sappers and miners—I couldn't be Guy Fawkes, and I couldn't be a true, devoted Jesuit. I don't like 'the end sanctifies the means.' Holy Mother ! I am venturing on dangerous grounds !”

And Aubrey—as one who would say, “Get thee behind me, Satan !”—began hurriedly to say the “Hours,” in order to banish these unprofitable meditations. And meanwhile the Rev. John Fabian was holding a friendly conversation with Mrs. Drewitt, who, on her part, was giving him a great deal of useful information respecting the family in which he was so deeply interested. “Yes, sir,” she said, in answer to one of the priest's guarded queries, put in the form of an affirmation ; “the General is very rich, far richer than any Seaton ever was before him. He's been prospered, you see ; the estates turn in ever so much more than they did when he succeeded his father, Squire Anthony ; there's that hæmatite ore on the land that only wants working to be worth thousands and thousands a year. Then part of my Lady Sarah's fortune—and it was a handsome one—stayed with him ; and last and best, he got a whole heap of money in the war-time, when he was commander, you know. Whether he took it off the French or the Spaniards whom he conquered, I'm sure I cannot say ; but I don't doubt he got it honourably, for he's a gallant gentleman, and a Seaton of Seatondale—

and that goes for something in these parts, I can tell you. But let me see, Mr. Fabian; you are akin to the Seatons yourself?"

"Not to your Seatons, Mrs. Drewitt; properly speaking, not to any Seaton, except by marriage. Mr. Aubrey Seaton's mother and my father were first cousins, that is all. My mother was a Venetian lady."

"Oh, indeed, sir!" replied Mrs. Drewett, puzzled, thinking of Venetian blinds, and wondering what sort of lady Mrs. Fabian could have been. "Well, sir," she continued, "whoever Mr. Aubrey is cousin to, he is one of the nicest young gentlemen I ever had the honour of entertaining; and I am sorry for him, that I am!"

"Why are you sorry, Mrs. Drewitt?"

"Because he's lost as goodly a heritage as eyes ever looked upon; and of course he has been brought up to look upon Seatondale as good as his own. And to think of his coming here promiscuous-like, just as little missy put in an appearance, as Dr. Wilson says! He's taken it beautifully, Papist or no Papist, and that's what I say of him, poor dear young man! I never in all my life took so to a young man; I felt like a mother to him the moment he stepped across my doorway."

"I am sure you have been exceedingly kind to him; he is always singing your praises. And no wonder; I have been half over Europe, and in Africa and in Asia besides, and I know what inns are, and yours, though it is homely, is the most comfortable of all I have ever tried—so sweet and clean and quiet, and cooking that might satisfy any epicure."

"And I am sure, sir, you are very good to say so; though I must confess I always do try to make people comfortable, whether they're gentle or simple. Ah, sir, many and many a time I've heard of the Popish heir, and wondered what he'd be like, when he came to his own; and I was as rejoiced as if anybody had given me a bag of money, when I knew for certain what Mrs. Seaton—poor lady!—was expecting. 'Now,' says I, to my master, 'them nasty, scheming, Popish Jesuits will be kept out!' For I must tell you, sir, that though I feel quite motherly towards Mr. Aubrey—if I may take the liberty of saying such

a thing—I do hate and dread the Romans like poison. I'd as soon harbour a nest of vipers—what we call hag-worms in this country—as I would a Jesuit priest. I may say so to you, I know, sir, for you are a clergyman of our own Church. You are a Protestant.”

“I call myself a Catholic, Mrs. Drewitt.”

“Dear me, sir. I quite understood that you were a clergyman of the Church of England.”

“And so I am. But do you not say, every Sunday, ‘I believe in the holy *Catholic* Church’?”

“Well, *yes*, to be sure I do. I see what you mean, sir. The Church of England is the true Catholic Church, I suppose. The Papists are only Papists, or at the best *Roman Catholics*.”

“They are Catholics, Mrs. Drewitt; God forbid I should disparage a faith which is founded on so much truth. But we of the Anglo-Catholic Church see things differently, and we have another light—a light that is growing clearer and stronger day by day, and year by year. The Church of England has a glorious future before her, if only she be steadfast and faithful to her charge.”

“I am very pleased to hear you say so, sir, for I love my Church; and I never could do with Dissent, which our rector says is *schism*, the sin from which we pray to be delivered in the Litany.”

“And he is right, Mrs. Drewitt. Hold fast to your mother Church; put schism far away from you; never consort with Dissenters; never listen to them; they will lead you into damnable errors; they are the enemies of true Catholicism.”

“And yet, sir, my master does say that they have done good—more good than will ever be known till the judgment-day. And though he don't hold with them, having always kept his Church, boy and man, as his father did before him, he respects them, he says, because they are so much in earnest.”

“Earnestness is a good thing, but what if one is earnest in wrong doing? Years ago, perhaps—mind, I say *perhaps*,—there was more excuse for Dissenters than there is now. The Church was asleep; now she is awake, and a great revival of religion has commenced.”

"Still, sir, Dissenters—good Dissenters—*may* go to heaven?"

The Rev. John Fabian looked extremely grave and even sad. "We will not discuss that point, Mrs. Drewitt," he said; "it is too solemn, too painful a subject. God is merciful, and His mercies are uncovenanted as well as covenanted. We know that there is salvation within the pale of the Church—that is sufficient for us. What there may be without it does not concern us to inquire. Let us pray for the unity of the Church, that heresies and schisms may cease, and that all wanderers may be brought into the true fold."

"And I say 'amen,' sir. But what a pity it is that Mr. Aubrey can't be converted. Will he stay in these parts?"

"I think not. His father seems to want him at Southerleigh. Mr. Seaton is a hypochondriacal invalid, and naturally desires the comfort of his only son's society. But I feel much inclined to pitch my tent among you, Mrs. Drewitt; I am at present an unattached clergyman, and my health is not what it was. I told Mr. Clifford yesterday that I had more than half a mind to settle down somewhere in Seatondale, and give him a helping hand when he needs it. Regular work I am forbidden to undertake, but some work I must do or die; a conscientious priest can never, under any circumstances, throw off the responsibility of his ordination vows."

You will wonder, perhaps, that Mr. Fabian—as we must now call him—should speak of himself as a "priest." But it did not savour of Rome to Mrs. Drewitt's ears, for the old Romish title lingered long in those primitive border counties without the smallest tinge of Popery about it. Years ago, when the simple North-country people knew no more of the Anglo-Catholic movement than of the principles of Positivism, the rector or vicar of the parish was universally called the *priest*, so, in fact, were the curates, if only they were not too juvenile. And even then many a young B.A., just in deacon's orders, figured as "our young priest." There was nothing either Popish or Ritualistic in the custom, it was only the way of the North-country folk; and does not the Prayer-book itself

talk about the *priest* continually? Is it not written therein, "Then the priest, standing up, shall say"? Is not the "*priest*" commanded to stand at the north side of the communion table, when, for the fourth time during that service, or amalgamation of services—for which all good Episcopalians have to thank Archbishop Laud—he has to say the Lord's Prayer? Is it not the "*priest*" who shall say the Collects, read the Offertory, exhort communicants, pronounce the absolution, turn to the Lord's table, to say "Lift up your hearts," say what is called "The Prayer of Consecration," and give the final blessing? Is it not the "*priest*" who baptizes the little babies, who meets the corpse at the entrance of the churchyard, who says all sorts of things by order of the Rubric? Therefore you must not condemn the simple Northerners as using a Popish phrase; they only followed out the teaching of the Prayer-book to the letter, and meant no more than if they said the minister, the parson, or the clergyman.

So Mrs. Drewitt was not in the least startled. With all her horror of Romanism, she often spoke of her own rector, Dr. Redmayne, as the priest of Chalfonts. And as for Mr. Fabian, she told her husband that she had never talked to a more excellent and pious man, and she thought it would be a right good thing for the neighbourhood if he did decide to stay among them, for he was just the priest to stir people up, and just the one to put those Cockleham Methodists to silence, for they thought nobody could pray or preach as they did. The question was, where could he reside? For there was no house in Seatondale itself fit for a gentleman, and he seemed to prefer Seatondale to Chalfonts. It was farther inland for one thing, and the immediate vicinity of the sea did not suit his constitution; besides, he had taken a fancy to Mr. Clifford and to his shabby little chapel-of-ease, and wished that they might be within walking distance of each other.

A few days passed quietly, without any word from General Seaton. Aubrey was moody and silent; he remained out of doors a great deal, for the weather had changed again for the better, and May came in with soft, southern gales and cloudless skies. He did some sketching, and he took the Priory Church in water-colours as a

present for Mrs. Drewitt, who regarded the progress of the drawing with excessive interest, esteeming it a most wonderful work of art. I am afraid, though, it was not a very artistic affair. Mr. Fabian told him his lights and shades were not well managed, and there was something decidedly wrong in the perspective. And Mr. Fabian was right; it is impossible to do a thing really well when you are not thinking about it, and all the while Aubrey was drawing lines and arches and washing in his tints, he was thinking about his uncle, and about the letter which he had written to him, and about the transformation of his confessor into a grave clergyman of the Anglican persuasion, so that the picture suffered, and was, when finished, but a very *mediocre* achievement.

Mr. Fabian, you must know, drew admirably himself; he sketched and he etched, he painted in oils and in water-colours, he drew with crayons and with lead-pencils. He could lithograph, and he was very successful with wood-engravings; photography was only just dawning, in the shape of blurred, spectral, expensive things called *daguerreotypes*; but so far as it went, Mr. Fabian knew all about it. In fact, he knew all about most things; was always ready with a classical quotation; could discourse learnedly on the geological theories of the day; had observed all sorts of natural phenomena in every part of the world; had a passion for ecclesiastical architecture, and a perfect craze about symbolism. Of course he was archæological, and would go any distance to inspect antique remains, to rub brasses, and dig up ancient pottery. He was a wonderful performer on the organ, and read the most difficult scores with facile skill. He spoke most modern languages, and was well up in their literature; he was an equal authority as regarded Shakespeare, Goethe, Racine, Dante, Cervantes, and Tegner; he was great at Scandinavian mythology, and could interpret old *runes* and Sagas as easily as most scholars construe Virgil and Cicero. There was no end to his accomplishments, for Dr. Wilson soon discovered that he had a wonderful knowledge of medicine, and was a first-rate anatomist.

Add to all these gifts and acquirements a handsome person, an imposing figure, a decidedly aristocratic bearing

and high-bred tone, and a voice so wondrously rich and mellow and resonant, that even Sam Drewitt said, "To hear his Reverence talk was as good as listening to the anthem!" Now you know the kind of *rara avis* which was at this juncture brooding over Seatondale and its neighbourhood, and you may be sure such a man could not fail to be widely appreciated and admired.

At last came a letter from the General, short and stiff, but courteous. He would be glad to see his kinsman before he returned to Southerleigh. Seaton Hall was at his service and at Mr. Fabian's. Would they both come over and spend a day or two with himself and Mr. Clifford, excusing him if he left the duties of host very much to that gentleman, as he was not yet equal to society?

"Of course, we must go," said Aubrey, who had watched his preceptor while he read the letter. "I was beginning to think that I should have to depart without making the acquaintance of my uncle and cousin."

"Your cousin? Oh, yes, the baby—I forgot! She is not yet baptized, they say."

"They do not think much of the sacrament of baptism in these parts, it seems."

"These people are not only heretics, but heathens, Aubrey. The Church of England is a century behind-hand here; it's 'High and Dry Church' in the North, I am told. Very *dry* indeed; there's not much doubt about that; only I should call it 'low and dry'! I hope ere long to indoctrinate the Church here with another spirit. It's a good soil—fine fallow ground, that only wants *judicious* cultivation and proper seed. These people, from the highest to the lowest, are not at all evangelical; nobody takes in that cursed *Record* hereabouts; they despise Dissent as vulgar and disreputable, and unlearned as unauthorised, but they really know nothing at all about it. They dread Romanism, and have a lively recollection of the fires of Smithfield, and take a morbid interest in the terrors of the Inquisition. You might as well try to convert an elderly Mussulman on the spot to Wesleyanism or Quakerism as endeavour straightway to convince any of these good, respectable folk of the duty of allegiance to our most Holy Father, Gregory XVI. But they will



never recognise their *bête noir*, 'Popery,' under the sweet, dignified, æsthetic guise of orthodox Anglo-Catholicism! I talked to Dr. Redmayne a little yesterday; he is a capital fellow, and speaks of restoring the church, and his daughters are given to Gregorians, I find. He is too lazy ever to be pushed to the front, though, and he does not like changes overmuch. Still, he believes on the whole the Oxford school is going in the right direction. 'It will help to stem the torrent of Dissent and infidelity which threatens to oversweep the land,' he sententiously observes. Of course, I thoroughly agree with him. Infidelity and schism, which is to say *heresy*, are the two fell giants against which the Church must bear witness, and with which she must combat. Redmayne seemed pleased to hear we were to be neighbours, and he went so far as to ask me to preach for him on Sunday, but I excused myself till my chest is stronger. I am not going to lift up my voice in any of their pulpits just yet. I must understand the people a little better, and take a more exact measure of the clergy themselves. The curate of Seaton-dale will be easily influenced; he is beaten down, poor man, with want of money and family cares. The General must be led to do something for him; we must build a church in the place of that consecrated barn; we must get Dr. Redmayne to co-operate, and I must be generous when funds are needed. If I find the General what I believe him to be, I will soon make myself so indispensable to him, that he will dread nothing more than my leaving his vicinity."

"But to do all this, you must openly declare yourself a clergyman of the Church of England."

"And I am a clergyman of the Church of England, in very truth; for the true Church of England is none other than the Church of Rome. An usurper may call himself *king*; but that in nowise alters the actual right of the lawful and temporarily dethroned monarch. The Church of England had no more right to 'reform' herself than I have to reconstruct the constitution of the country! Therefore, without scruple, I avow myself a clergyman of the Church of England. I am in Holy Orders—I commit no crime. If I wrong any one it is myself, in.

submitting to hold my tongue, and in contenting myself, for the nonce, with a ritual which I heartily despise. But one must stoop to conquer, and we have the promise that 'whoso abaseth himself shall be exalted.' Also, certain work is given me to do, and I must do it heartily. Were I sent to-morrow to sweep the muddiest crossing in London, it would be my duty meekly to obey. Obedience, my dear son, is the key-stone of every arch in the Church of God. Shall we settle to go to Seatondale the day after to-morrow?"

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## CHAPTER IX.

### THE METHODIST GARDENER.

"Ave Maria! thou whose name  
 All but adoring love may claim,  
 Yet may we reach thy shrine;  
 For He, thy Son and Saviour, vows  
 To crown all lowly lofty brows  
 With love and joy like thine.

"Bless'd is the womb that bare Him—bless'd  
 The bosom where His lips were press'd;  
 But rather bless'd are they  
 Who hear His word and keep it well,  
 The living homes where Christ shall dwell,  
 And never pass away."

GENERAL SEATON received his guests with a grave and rigid formality, which made his nephew feel embarrassed and ill at ease, and at the same time compassionate, for on his uncle's stern face was the impress of the overwhelming sorrow which had so very recently befallen him. And Aubrey said to himself, "Grief, not pride, has frozen my poor uncle's heart." The four gentlemen dined together; Mrs. Clifford had not been invited, and long before the meal was concluded Aubrey was weary, and longing to escape into the beautiful May twilight, which like a soft

veil hung over the hills and crags of Seatondale. The General spoke little, though he behaved with all possible courtesy; the two clergymen seemed thoroughly to enjoy each other's society, and for the first time for many years Mr. Clifford began to feel old ambitions stirring within his heart, and to wonder whether he might not shape to better and nobler ends the life which was passing away so drowsily and so unsatisfactorily at quiet Seatondale.

Mr. Fabian only talked on ordinary themes; but he made interesting whatsoever he touched upon. There was nothing pedantic or stilted in his conversation, nothing at all overstrained or pompous: it was perfectly simple and natural, and yet it was rich in all kinds of rare information, and singularly fresh, striking, and original. The curate thought him the best read and the pleasantest man he had ever met with. General Seaton, though he joined seldom in the discourse, could not but appreciate the mind and tone of his accomplished visitor, and wondered more and more who he really was, and what were his relations with young Aubrey Seaton! When the cloth was withdrawn, and the dessert was placed on the shining mahogany, for they followed old fashions at Seaton Hall,—besides, dinners *à la Russe* were unknown then, even in Mayfair,—the host relaxed a little, and roused himself to enter into some subject which Mr. Clifford and Mr. Fabian were earnestly discussing.

No religious topic had been started, chiefly on Aubrey's account; for of course the General and the curate looked on Mr. Fabian as one of themselves, and the young man was supposed to be the solitary black sheep of the party. Aubrey drank little wine, and the General, perceiving that he looked longingly out upon the terrace, which commanded a lovely view of some of the Lake mountains, begged him not to stand on ceremony if he would prefer a ramble in the gardens to sitting longer at the table. Glad to be released, he sprang up, and soon found himself in a beautiful *parterre*, laid out with exquisite taste, and evidently well cultivated. Aubrey felt sure that this garden was poor Mrs. Seaton's especial plot. It sloped down to a small tarn, and one side of it was bounded by a tiny

babbling brook, which sang its pleasant tune under the budding trees, and mingled its soft undertone with the clear warble of blackbirds and thrushes, and others of the feathered choir that peacefully joined in nature's sweet and solemn evensong. It was a fair scene—in very truth, “a goodly heritage.”

Yes! but not Aubrey's, and for a few minutes the young man could not help pondering the might-have-beens of his rather singular situation. If this little baby-girl had not been born, or if she had died with her mother, as so many tender infants do, for no very apparent reason, what a difference it would have made. Oh! what a difference circumstances make in nearly everybody's lot! How perfectly to our own liking might our lives be mapped out, were it not for those dubious “*ifs*” and those insurmountable “*buts*!” But the good Lord knows all, and the ifs and buts that sound to our vexed ears like damnatory clauses are doubtless benedictions in disguise.

Aubrey could not tell why, he could not imagine why, but his heart was knit to Seatondale, and he had looked on it lovingly from the first hour of his beholding it. He stood for some minutes under an emerald-leaved lime, in whose boughs the golden glow of the sunset yet seemed to linger, thinking what it must be to be the lawful heir of those broad lands, the possessor of that rich estate, and wondering how the girl-heiress would feel as she grew up to womanhood, and came to understand her own importance. He was roused by some one bidding him, in broad North-country accent, “gude neet.”

The man had a rake in one hand, and an empty flower-pot in another; he was evidently one of the gardeners, perhaps the one who had chief charge of this sweet, secluded spot.

“It's a beautiful evening,” said Aubrey, knowing nothing else to say.

“Yes, and 'twill be fine to-morrow,” returned the man, giving a finishing touch to a bed close at hand. “It was a rare fine sunset, and the gnats fly high in the air, and the mountains are clear, and yet not *too* clear, ye ken. When ye can see the very dints and scars on the face of

the far-off crags, ye may ken there will be rain, and plenty of it. Ain't that a fine Crown Imperial?"

"Is that a Crown Imperial? I called it a yellow lily. Yes, it's a beautiful flower. I gathered one at Chalfonts the other day that I might examine the nectaries with a magnifying glass; they are wonderful when you come to look into them."

"All things that the Lord has made are wonderful, young gentleman, only we don't take the trouble to look into them, as you say. See, now! these lilies of the valley, and Solomon's Seal! A week ago they were ugly, unsightly things, just springing from the black earth where they had lain so safe and warm all through the winter, and now, behold their bonnie green leaves, and their graceful stems, and the wee buds that will come out presently into milk-white fairy bells! Every bit of them is a marvel; and nobody knows how they grewed and germed, and nobody could make a single leaf with the sap in it, and thousands of little veins, showing a finer network than any grand lady's precious lace! But the good Lord did it all, working in silence and in darkness, and under the snow and the frozen clods; and did it for our pleasure, for there's no use in lilies except to look lovely and to smell sweet, and that's to my thinking the best use of all! There's many an acre of land in these parts that bears nought worth speaking of—no corn of any sort, no goodly trees yielding fruit or timber for man's needs, no grass, hardly, for the crag-sheep's food; but look where you will, north and south of bonnie Seatondale, look from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, and you'll see nothing but beauty—a beauty, too, that's always changing, and yet is always the same! That sounds queer, don't it, sir? but them that kens mountains and vales kens its truth. You know that verse of the godly hymn, 'I sing the Almighty power of God,' I dare say, sir; we all learns it when we're lile bairns, whether we're rich or poor."

"I don't at this moment remember it. Indeed, I have learned few hymns in the English language, though I know a good many in Latin."

"Latin's a fine, grand language, I trow, sir, and good

for gentlefolks, especially for the parsons,—though there's parsons as does very well without it; but for a *hymn*, I think there's nought like good old English, that a bairn can understand! But you must mind *that* hymn, if ye think, sir; the General could say it this moment, I'll go bail, though perhaps he hasn't repeated it these fifty years."

"What hymn is it? I am curious to hear!"

"It's—

" 'I sing the Almighty power of God,  
That made the mountains rise,  
That spread the flowing seas abroad,  
And built the lofty skies.'

Sure you mind it, now I say it, sir?"

"No, I do not. I never heard of it before; but it is very grand. What great poet wrote it?"

"A good man named *Watts*. He wrote heaps of fine pieces. Don't ye know, "From all that dwell below the skies" and—

" 'Wide as His vast dominion lies,  
Let the Creator's name be known;  
Loud as His thunder shout His praise,  
And sound it lofty as His throne'?"

"I never heard either of them. They are very fine, though. Who do you say wrote them?"

"Why, *Watts*! Gudesake, sir, but ye *must* know *Watts*! All the world—that is, the Christian world—knows him and his poetry. At least ye do know, 'How doth the little busy bee!' and 'Let dogs delight,' and 'Whene'er I take my walks abroad'? As I said, all the Christian world learns them while they're little, and they never forget them. The Pagan world don't know *Watts*, I reckon, and perhaps not the Popish world, which is very near akin to the other. Pope and Pagan go together, ye know, sir, in 'Pilgrim's Progress.'"

"No, I don't! my man. I belong to what you call the Popish world, and that is why I don't know any of your hymns; not but what they are good enough for a true Catholic, and I shall immediately procure the works of *Mr. Watts*."

"You don't mean to say, sir, that you're the Popish heir, as was?"

"Yes, I am that unfortunate person. I am Aubrey Seaton, next of kin to your General, after his little daughter."

"I'm very sorry for you, sir. I'm sorry for what you've lost of this world's honour and gear; but I am more sorry for what ye are losing through not knowing the Lord Jesus Christ, and the blessing of His presence, in your heart."

"But I do know Christ. Catholics worship Christ far more devoutly than do heret—Protestants."

"Hoot! but they *don't*! They give His honour to His mother and to other dead saints. They pray to the Virgin Mary, and she can no more hear them than the poor mistress that died last month can hear me now, if I call to her."

"How do you know the dead, the holy dead, cannot hear you?"

"Just tell me one thing. Are they omnipresent and omniscient like God Almighty?"

"Certainly not. Our Church does not claim for them equal honours with the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity!"

"Then,—granting dead ears can hear what we poor mortals say,—they can't hear more than one person at a time, can they? And how shall I know when it's my turn to be listened to? Perhaps you'll call upon your Virgin to help you this very night; well, what if she is attending to some one in America? No, thank you, sir; I'll keep to my Lord Jesus Christ, because I *do* know that He hears everybody. He has left us His promise to be with us always, even to the end of the world. And that contents me, sir. I want none but Jesus—for none but Jesus can do helpless sinners good!"

"But can you suppose that you please Jesus Christ by showing His blessed mother disrespect?"

"Begging your pardon, sir, I don't show her no disrespect whatever. But there's a wide difference between making a goddess of her and insulting her memory. The Virgin Mary was, I am sure, a very pure and holy young woman—one in a thousand, as you may say; but she was a *sinner* for all that, and had to be *saved*! She had great

honour put upon her, and she knew it, but she never took upon herself when she was alive; *she* never set up for being 'Queen of Heaven' and 'Morning Star,' and 'Gate of Heaven'! She left all that to her Son. And, sir, when you go extolling 'our Lady,' as you call her, in such fashion, you commit downright *blasphemy*."

"And yet it is written in your own Bible, I believe, 'Blessed is the woman that bore Thee, and the paps that gave Thee suck.'"

"Right enough. A woman did say that, and Christ's mother was *blessed*, and no mistake; but why not finish the text, sir? If you take half texts out of the Bible you may prove any lie! Who would think of reading any book in that way? No, no, sir, finish your passage."

"That is all, I am sure," replied Aubrey, wishing himself well out of this unlooked-for controversy. "There is no more."

"Begging your pardon, Mr. Seaton, but there is! and I'll show it to you, if it is not too dark. Anyway, I'll give you chapter and verse, and you can find it for yourself. We Methodists don't want folks to take things on trust from us; you may read for yourselves, search and see—prove all things, hold fast that which is good! Here, sir, you have it—Gospel of Luke, eleventh chapter and 27th verse. I can just make it out, knowing it so well as I do. Listen: 'And it came to pass, as He spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice and said unto Him, Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the paps which Thou hast sucked.'"

"Comes to the same thing, you see. Your version and ours pretty much alike there."

"Exactly, sir; but bide a wee, for I have not yet finished. The Book goes on: 'But He said, *Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.*' Just as if Christ had known—as of course He did—all that your Church would do concerning His dear mother."

"Ah, my friend!" quoth Aubrey; "but that Protestant version of yours is not so trustworthy as could be desired. Your translators found it easy enough to accommodate passages to their own views, and some, I am well assured, are



the merest interpolations. That which you have just quoted is one of them, doubtless. Our Lord never could have said that His disciples, even though faithful to the death, dying in the odour of sanctity as noble martyrs, were *more* blessed than she who is blessed above all women—the mother, most chaste, most undefiled; the queen of angels, glorious for ever!”

“I fancy it is just the same in your own Testament, sir. Look and see for yourself; don’t take my poor word. And, what would be better still, if you are a scholar, as no doubt you are, look it out in the Latin or the Greek. I am sure I don’t know in which language the gospels were at first written; for I am not a book-learned man, though I have been used to think deeply about things, and I know my English Bible. Will you look, Mr. Seaton?”

“Of course I will. I have a Douay Testament somewhere, published under the seal of his Holiness, Pope Pius the Sixth, in 1778. I will see for myself.”

“Thank you, sir; that is all I ask.”

“What did you say you were?—a *Methodist*?”

“A Methodist I am, sir, and I am not ashamed of it; though Methodists in these parts are not counted much. Well! there was a time when our Saviour and His disciples were not counted much, I reckon, and the servant must not look to be greater than his master.”

Aubrey recoiled in sudden horror. Here, then, was one of those detestable Dissenters of whom Father Fabian had spoken! And the Father was right, he thought, for there was something in the speech of this rude, unlettered man, that spoke to the heart something, that if listened to, might be more truly subversive to the interests of holy Church than a score of Mr. Clifford’s most elaborate sermons. Yes! the Methodists were a very dangerous set of people, there was no doubt of that! Now Aubrey comprehended what his preceptor had meant, when he said it was easy to gather converts out of the Anglican Church, when it was non-evangelical, but altogether impossible to gather them even one by one from the bosom of uncompromising Dissent. And of all kinds of Dissent, it seemed to Aubrey that Methodism must be the most mischievous.

And he said to himself, "As a champion of the true faith, I ought to study Dissent and all other forms of heresy. I must know something about my foes before I come hand to hand with them, and you should study a people—I read it only the other day—by their printed and published creeds and their forms of worship. But have they any creeds? Have they any ritual? I must inquire for myself."

At that moment a servant from the house came to say that coffee was served in the cedar drawing-room, and would Mr. Seaton like to take any? Aubrey was only too glad to escape, for though he would not admit it to himself, he had a secret conviction that the ignorant Methodist had had the best of it! So bidding the gardener a courteous good-night—for Aubrey was a true gentleman—he followed the footman into the house, and to the cedar drawing-room.

The gentlemen were sipping their coffee and talking pleasantly together. The General was conversing with Mr. Fabian most amicably. After a word or two with Aubrey, they returned to the subject which had engrossed them; it seemed to be something about residence.

"There is not a house nearer than Chalfonts where you *could* live," said General Seaton, thoughtfully. "There is not even a cottage here that could be turned into a decent habitation for a gentleman!"

"I am not particular, General," replied Mr. Fabian. "I can make myself contented under nearly any circumstances. I don't want a lordly mansion. Besides, it is so easy to improve a place. A good-sized cottage would quite answer my purpose."

"There is not a good-sized cottage to be had; I don't know that there is a hut vacant just at present. And, Mr. Fabian, you do not know what our *cottages* are."

"Do you think the Thwaites's would take him in, as boarder, at their farm?" asked Mr. Clifford. "Joseph Thwaites and his wife *have* taken lodgers, and their house is roomy and tolerably comfortable, though I dare not say much for Mrs. Thwaites's cooking. When the Brownings were there, they complained that every dish was strongly

flavoured with peat smoke; though I believe one may get used to that, as one does to curry and vanilla."

"I should not mind the cooking," returned Mr. Fabian; "but I should very much prefer a small home of my own to the most commodious apartment. I am not a poor man; I would not mind taking a good deal of expense upon myself if I could find some quiet place, capable of improvement—of adaptation rather, to my simple requirements."

"There is *Malham Tower*!" said the General, turning to the curate.

"*Malham Tower*!" responded that gentleman, aghast. "Why, it is all but a ruin!"

"So it is, but it strikes me it might be made comfortable. The Keep is all right, you know, both water-proof and wind-proof: as for the Monks' Chambers, and the Chapel, they would not be wanted. The out-buildings could be patched up, I dare say. Is it worth thinking about?"

"I should not like to be your tenant at *Malham Tower*, General," replied Mr. Clifford, gravely.

"*Malham Tower*! I like the sound of it," said Mr. Fabian, lighting up to sudden interest. "Tell me all about it; is it far from here?"

"Not two miles, if you go straight across the park, taking the private paths. I can walk there in half-an-hour easily. *Malham Tower* is an old *Peel*, standing on the borders of my own property, which ends suddenly at that spot, though it runs on further to the west, almost to St. Ulpha's. It was partly dismantled in my grandfather's time, and no one has lived in it for the last forty years, I am certain."

"You spoke of a chapel, or a monk's chamber?"

"Ah, yes! that part went to destruction long ago; even before my ancestor was converted from Romanism—I beg your pardon, Aubrey—the ecclesiastical portion of the building had been suffered to fall into decay. That piece of it makes a very picturesque bit of ruin, for the chapel, though small, was of the finest architecture, and the cloisters are in tolerable repair. I really am not well up in the history of *Malham Tower* as I ought to be; I only know that it was one of the Border towers, built by the

Seatons of old time, partly as a fortress, a defence against their enemies, and partly as a prison, if report be true; for it is said that one Alexander Seaton, in the reign of Queen Mary of bloody memory, took Thomas de Lacy prisoner, and kept him at Malham Tower till he died, thirty years afterwards."

"There are dungeons, then, I presume?"

"That there are! Half a dozen dark, noisome cells; but they were built up long ago, after a celebrated marauder hid himself in one of them, and defied the officers of justice, killing several of those who were sent to apprehend him. So only one underground apartment remains, and that will serve as an excellent wine cellar. I really think, Mr. Fabian, you might make Malham Tower serve your turn, and I shall be most happy to have you for a neighbour, and so, I am sure, will Mr. Clifford."

"You are very kind; but how did the monks you speak of come to the Tower?"

"They came when Bekanks was suppressed; only a few of them of the highest rank, personal friends of the then reigning Seaton—Percy Seaton his name was. He was a very zealous Romanist, willing to give up everything for his Church, so he put the monks in the Tower, and built, or rather enlarged the chapel which belonged to it, and when some brethren from Chalfonts asked leave to join them, he added the structure known as the 'Monks' Chambers'—a series of cells, extending over a line of cloisters, and communicating with the chapel, and gave them to the monks for ever, on condition of their saying certain masses for his soul—poor fool!—and for the souls of all the Seatons that should come after him."

"He gave it to the monks for ever? Perhaps some day they will claim their own?" said Aubrey.

"Not in my time," replied the General coldly, "nor I trust in my daughter's time. I do not wish to say anything unkind, but I should be very sorry to think that any portion of this, my fair inheritance, would ever become the prey of ecclesiastical powers. Even many of your own creed, Aubrey, distrust the so-called Religious Orders. What became of the monks of Malham Tower, I really do

not know; I believe they died out, and the place being deserted, fell into decay."

"Is Malham Tower very solitary?" asked Mr. Fabian.

"As solitary as a hermit could desire. Except one of the gamekeeper's lodges in the wood yonder, and a shepherd's cot further on, there is no house nearer than this one. But the view it commands is splendid! looking right over the estuaries of the Linster, and the Whinster, and St. Ulpha sands, and the bay beyond; to say nothing of the Bekanks Craggs and Fells. There is a little good land in the hollow near it, which ought to go with the Tower, so that if you like, you can do a little farming. The rent, of course, will be merely nominal. We will walk over to-morrow morning, and examine the place and its capacities at our leisure."

"I feel sure it will just suit me. I shall be the lonely monk of Malham Tower."

Mr. Clifford shuddered. He would as soon have taken lodgings in Seven Dials as in Malham Tower, with its evil repute, and its ghosts, and its dreary solitude. But, as he remarked to his wife, presently—"There is no accounting for tastes, and let each man please himself."

"I wonder," said Mrs. Clifford, "whether Mr. Fabian is a bachelor, or a widower? He is not young."

But the curate was already fast asleep, and made no reply.

## CHAPTER X.

## MALHAM TOWER.

"Cannot God's Spirit keep thy heart  
 Up to its holy, chosen part,  
 Amid the city's thronging scene,  
 As well as in the forest green?  
 'Tis sweet awhile to turn away,  
 And in the leafy groves to pray;  
 Then to thy post with cheerful brow,  
 Back with fresh energy to go.  
 . . . Needs not to turn to cloister cell,  
 To praise and glorify Him well;  
 'Twere pleasant to the flesh to leave  
 The haunts where crime and sorrow grieve;  
 Yet though the world we may not flee,  
*In it, not of it, must we be.*"

"You will not see Malham Tower till you are close upon it," said the General, as he and his friends toiled up the steep woody ascent; "it lies under the hill on this side, though it is tolerably open to the south and west, where the land, with few inequalities, slopes down to the sea-level."

"This a beautiful country of yours," said Mr. Fabian with enthusiasm. "It seems absurd that I know nothing at all about it, but the fact is I never was in the Lake district before, and yet I have travelled over half the world."

"I think we English-folk of the present day are singularly guilty of the folly of exploring all other countries before our own. Now, I have never set my foot in Wales, and I know absolutely nothing of the south-western counties! I could describe Castile and Andalusia far better than Devon or Cornwall. However, that was not quite my own fault; my duties took me abroad to Spain, to Alexandria, to Greece, and elsewhere; my inclinations kept me here in my own home country. A run up to London, just to get the provincial rust off, once a year, and a few weeks on the Scotch coast now and then, for sea-breezes, comprise all our travels for the last fifteen

years. We got to be regular stay-at-home birds; there was no place like Seatondale. And now I don't suppose I shall ever go far afield again; I am getting old and weary, and I do not intend to bring up my little daughter in a worldly fashion."

"I think you are quite right; a worldly education is a mistake, taking the lowest view of it. I believe it *never pays*. And what is as beautiful as a young life devoted to God, to works of holiness and charity?"

"True! true! but you did not exactly understand me. I only intended to say that I did not wish to bring up my child as a gay, fashionable woman, simply because I dislike fashionable life—having had a surfeit of it in my youth, in my first wife's time; and also, because I think—nay, I am sure—that a woman may enjoy more happiness at home, in the midst of her own people, than in any other situation. Still, I make no rash resolves; my poor little girl will be a great heiress, Mr. Fabian, and she ought to enjoy all the advantages which wealth and position can afford. It would not be wise in me to bring up my daughter in too much seclusion. I am old,—too old, alas! to be the father of a motherless infant. In all probability, she will enter into full possession of her rights while still very young. I do not think I shall live to see Miss Seaton attain her majority; it is not likely! I am sixty-three now, and the hardships of several harassing campaigns aged me considerably; and *now*, since my child came, I feel—I cannot say—how many years older than I was before! I am an old man, and there will be no more renewing of my youth, or of manly vigour. Yes, I am an old man, and but for my little one, I should rejoice to know that the end is not so very far off."

"Still, for that little one's sake, you must bear on," said Mr. Fabian, seemingly much affected. "God has given her to you,—a precious gift, pure from His own hand. You must live for her; you must be content for her dear sake to count yet many weary burdened years, before you go to rest. Forgive me, if I touch even reverently that which must be most sacred; but from all that I have heard, I am sure *she* would have wished it so."

The General turned away his head, his keen eyes were swimming with tears; but he grasped his companion's hand. How was it that Mr. Clifford, with his kind and pious condolences, had never moved him thus? This man, who was clearly a king among his fellows, spoke with a force, an authority even, that carried with his simplest words a certain weight, that could not be withstood. And yet how deep, how respectful, was his half-implied sympathy! Those rich mellow tones of his, so sad, so earnest, and so kind, touched some chord in the General's sorely wounded heart, and awakened a responsive sentiment as strange as it was sweet and soothing. General Seaton was not a truly religious man, though on the whole, I think he was faithful to his lights; but, he said to himself as he trod among the junipers on Middlebarrow Heights—"Thank God! I have found a friend. This man has come to comfort me and to help me in my bitter pain and solitude."

A few yards more, and the wide heath-land they were traversing sloped abruptly, and they saw before them, almost at their feet, the ancient Tower of Malham. It was a fine old Peel, with machicoulis and tourelles; the walls, grey with age and weather-stained, seemed immensely solid, and on one side were clothed with aged ivy; the carved stone mullions were perfect, and the arched gateway by which the Tower was entered showed the remains of a long disused portcullis. Though lying low, as regarding the eminence from which the gentlemen had descended, the Tower stood upon raised ground. The acclivity, as it was approached, was considerable, but behind there was a steep and almost sheer descent from the edge of what must once have been the courtyard of the fortalice; and far beneath was a stretch of peaty land called, in northern parlance, "a moss," about which wound several narrow sluggish streams, all converging towards a small, dark, solemn-looking tarn which washed the base of a beetle-shaped, rocky, low fell, or rather ridge, crowned with a thick wood of pines and larches. The view from the front of the Tower was, as the General observed, truly magnificent. First of all there was the moorland covered with brake and bramble, and the sweet creamy little



Burnet Rose ; then, the limestone ravine of Malham, along which foamed and tumbled a mountain stream, and where rare ferns and curious mosses were alleged to grow ; then, the estuaries of two small tidal rivers wandering over the golden sands till they lost themselves in the deep seawater, which shimmered and sparkled under the clear blue sky of the lovely summer noon. Also there were green fells and fir-clad slopes, and grey crags, and a piece of barren, undulating heath on which lay huge boulders and splints of rock, and masses of silver-grey fretted stone overgrown with creeping plants, moss, and lichen, and garlanded with sprays and festoons of the shining wild geranium—the beautiful *Geranium Lucidum* of botanists, which seems to need no soil wherein to flourish, and which turns to a clear crimson, leaves and stems and all, as the summer advances.

“There ! what do you think of that ?” said the General, as they paused on a little stone bridge over what was rather a dry trench than an extinct moat. “Could you have imagined a fairer landscape ?”

“I never saw one so perfectly combining *all* the elements of beauty,” replied Mr. Fabian.

Aubrey was too much enraptured to speak ; he had never heard of the “thoughts that do lie too deep for tears,” but they pressed on his heart at that moment so strongly that he scarcely knew whether the pleasure were not half pain.

“That must have been a playground of the Titans !” continued Mr. Fabian ; “your land seems to grow rocks and boulders ; every one of them fit to be put into a picture ! This must have been a volcanic region long, long ago—hundreds, perhaps thousands of years before Adam and Eve were created.”

“That is what the *savans* say. For myself I am no geologist ; I scarcely know the meaning of *miocene* and *eocene*. I have studied Vauban to better purpose than Lyell. But there are strange theories about the land here, and queer legends of earthquakes that must have occurred before the world began. And—you’ll see it presently—down in Malham Moss is a lake, that all the country folk declare to be bottomless, or at least unfathomable. One

thing is certain, that it is affected at certain periods by the tide. If you come here, Mr. Fabian, and care to study nature, you will find plenty to occupy your thoughts."

"Only too much, I am afraid. I could lead a delightfully idle life in the midst of so much that is wonderful and new and beautiful."

"If you studied to some purpose, I should scarcely call it idle. How much we, who cannot, or do not care to investigate, owe to the men who have well pondered and weighed the half-formed theories of the ages, who have explored Nature's fruitful mysteries, and discovered and arranged for our benefit those laws and systems which we call Science—a sort of Learning-made-Easy, which we shallow ones are only too thankful to adopt and make our own."

"What you say is quite true. Much is owed to men of profound science, among whom, however, I do not number myself. I am only a dabbler. And I may not dabble too much, lest I neglect my duties."

"But you will have no duties here."

"Nay, but I must have duties everywhere. I am sworn to the service of God's altars, consecrated to the work of His Church. An ordained clergyman can never cast away his responsibilities."

"Once a clergyman always a clergyman,' you mean."

"I mean far more than that, General Seaton. I, too, have heard the voice which says—

" 'Ye, who your Lord's commission bear,  
His way of mercy to prepare;  
Angels He calls ye; be your strife  
To lead on earth an angel's life.  
*Think not of rest*, though dreams be sweet,  
Start up, and ply your heavenward feet.  
Is not God's oath upon your head,  
Ne'er to sink back on slothful bed,  
Never again your loins untie,  
Nor let your torches waste and die,  
Till when the shadows thickest fall,  
Ye hear your Master's midnight call? ' "

You all know those lines, I dare say; but General Seaton had never heard them before. Thirty years ago people were not nearly so familiar with Keble's "Christian Year" as they are now. Mr. Clifford had heard them, or

read them, somewhere ; but they had made slight impression on him. His new friend's solemnity and earnestness awed him a good deal. Like many other careless, though well-intentioned persons, he was open to strong impressions, and he felt rather uncomfortable as he reflected that it had never occurred to him to regard his ordination vows in this solemn light. Also, he wondered whether his new friend and coadjutor, who had so suddenly appeared, might not after awhile become rather troublesome, forcing upon his consideration many questions which he had always avoided, simply because he hated trouble, and because he had brought himself to believe that the game was not worth the candle. He listened to Fabian's quotation in utter silence ; it was very fine, certainly, but not the sort of thing to which he was accustomed. As for the General, he was struck with profound admiration : they fell like a trumpet-blast upon his ear, those words of fervid power, uttered in Fabian's deep, low, thrilling tones. In his soldier days he had been no loiterer in the ranks, no military idler in ladies' bowers, and he could appreciate to the full, true, earnest service in any sphere of life. He comprehended, suddenly as it were, to what sort of service the soldier of Christ is called ; and he felt humbled, remembering his own deficiencies and his lifelong negligence and indifference.

"That is the way in which the profession of holy orders should be viewed," he was beginning, when Mr. Fabian gravely, but gently interrupted.

"Pardon me,—the Church is a *vocation*—not a profession."

"Again you are right," replied the General. "We will talk this over seriously another time. Just now, I see Mr. Clifford is impatient of standing in the hot sun. Let us enter the Tower—your future abode, I trust, Mr. Fabian."

Coming out of the warm sunshiny air into the deep shade of the deserted Tower, they all felt a sudden chill. The place was in good repair so far as the outer walls and the roof went, but broken casements and wide chimneys, fireless for many a year, had let in winter snows and summer showers. The lower rooms seemed utterly unin-

habitable, and the winding stone stairs were very much decayed. A sudden clamour and flutter of wings uprose, as the General and his party advanced into what had once been the refectory of the monks. The birds had built and hatched their little ones so long undisturbed, under shelter of those massive walls, that they were doubtless angry, as well as surprised, at this unexpected invasion of their quarters. They all flew away, however, except one large white owl, who sat blinking, on a shattered corbel, regarding the intruders with apathetic scorn.

"Don't frighten him!" said Mr. Fabian, as Aubrey, lad-like, tried to arouse him with a whoop; "he shall be my pet, my Pallas Athene, if he is not driven away by the workmen, who *must* come in to do the needful repairs."

"Needful indeed!" responded the General shivering, and pulling up the collar of his coat. "Fabian! You don't mean to say you will live in this tumble-down old ruin?"

"It is not a ruin, General Seaton. There is nothing wanting that cannot easily be supplied. Let me see! I shall make this the *kitchen*."

"Your cooks will give warning before they have cooked you half-a-dozen dinners. Fancy roasting a joint before that grate!"

"That grate must come out, and be replaced with a certain kind of cooking stove, or close range, such as I have seen in France; and there must be some shelves, and a cupboard or two for my pots and kettles. Properly furnished and well warmed, this will be a right noble kitchen, hall, or what you will. Now let us go higher."

The upper rooms were almost as comfortless as the lower ones, but one large and nearly square apartment especially delighted Mr. Fabian. It was lofty, and had two high windows, one a kind of oriel, looking different ways. The view from either was splendid; the oriel looked over the wild crags and fells to the great mountain peaks beyond, the other commanded the green ravine, the estuary, and a lovely expanse of sea. The floor was of solid oak, as sound as when laid down, and the walls too were panelled in oak, under a beautifully-carved oaken

cornice. There was a stone mantel-piece, covered with sculptured devices of the chase, and above it, on the broad chimney-breast, something that looked like the ghost of a faded fresco. Mr. Fabian rubbed his hands delightedly. "This will be my drawing-room, study, and library!" he said. "Here I shall live winter and summer, morning, noon, and night, when I am at home. I have some fine old oak presses that will accommodate my books and papers, and I have a tapestry screen that will be useful, I expect, on windy days; and I think I must treat myself to a good thick turkey carpet. The walls, or rather the panels, are past repolishing, I am afraid, so the more they are covered with books and pictures the better. You will not know the room when you see it again, General."

"Wait till you have looked at the bedrooms."

The bedrooms were *not* particularly inviting, and would probably have repelled a Sybarite, at first view; but Mr. Fabian was not likely to concern himself about crumpled rose-leaves. His habits, he said, were simple, almost to severity; he should want only a small iron bedstead, and two or three necessary articles of furniture of the plainest description. A light closet adjoining would do for a dressing or bath room. Aubrey knew that it would be the priest's own *Oratory*! There were half-a-dozen more rooms than Mr. Fabian could possibly find any use for; his family would consist of himself and his housekeeper, and one serving-man, who would probably be accommodated in the out-buildings. There was the refectory for the domestics, a chamber over it which could serve as his own eating-room; the beautiful oak-room, a story higher, and the sleeping-room and cabinet, as he called the octagonal closet adjacent. "As for the upper rooms," he said, "I will have them put into order at once; my housekeeper can take which she likes, and I will have one fitted up as a guest chamber—for I have many friends who may come to visit me from afar. And that is all that I shall do at present. So here I am, your tenant, General Seaton, if you will accept me."

"Accept you? Yes! and most heartily, if you can make up your mind to become the inhabitant of so deso-

late a place; but I warn you, you will too often have to play the hermit."

"And in the winter," pursued Mr. Clifford—"and our northern winters are severe as a rule, and never very mild—you may be snowed up for weeks; as much shut in from the outer world as were the monks of the desert. We cannot come to you, and you cannot come to us; there are so many deep hollows between this and Seatondale that the drifts are impassable. There is a legend that the person who lived here—one of the half-crazy Durrells—was all but starved, during one long storm which lasted ten weeks."

"A snow-storm last ten weeks!" replied Mr. Fabian, amazed. "Why, I wonder the Tower itself was not buried, battlements and all!"

"Oh, you do not understand our northern speech," explained the General. "As long as the snow lies unmelted on the ground, we reckon that the storm lasts. In 1837—8, two snow-storms lasted us from November till the middle of March. But seriously, you might be put to very great inconvenience through a tremendous and prolonged fall of snow, such as we sometimes have in these high latitudes of ours! I am not sure that we could dig you out alive."

"Not if the snow lay ten weeks. But to be forewarned is enough. When the autumn wanes I must prepare for the enemy, who may possibly blockade my castle. My housekeeper is one in a thousand, and knows how to lay in her stores; I would trust her to victual a ship, or a garrison expecting a siege. I shall keep a cow, and fowls; as you suggested, I may as well amuse my leisure with a little farming. And with a sack of flour, a good provision of oatmeal, some dried fish, and a side of bacon always in hand for the winter season, I think we need not fear the pangs of actual hunger! When may I take possession, General Seaton?"

"This moment, if you choose to be so rash. We shall not quarrel about the rent, I promise you; you may pay a trifle for the land, if you will, but I shall decline to receive anything for this old ruin."

"Then I shall decline to be your tenant. I should

prefer to take the place on a long lease, and pay a reasonable rent; then I should feel as if Malham Tower were my own stronghold, and I need not grudge to lay out my money upon it. But all that we can presently discuss; now let us, if you please, inspect the outhouses, and then the chapel and the cloisters. Perhaps I may restore the ecclesiastical buildings—who knows; have morning and evening service daily, and outdo Mr. Clifford."

Mr. Clifford laughed.

"You may restore the chapel—though it would cost you a fair fortune to do so—and you may have the services you speak of; you may turn Puseyite even, and go in for vespers and matins, nones and compline, midnight mass, and all the rest of it, only the congregation will be—*nowhere*, unless, following St. Anthony's example, you preach to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field."

Having inspected the outhouses where the cow and Mr. Fabian's horse would have to reside, the gentlemen turned to the cloisters. They were really beautiful, though on a very small scale; and as for the chapel, Mr. Fabian pronounced it "a gem," although it was windowless, and for the most part roofless, and entirely despoiled.

Aubrey seemed lost in meditation. He had been unusually silent since his arrival at Seaton Hall. Mrs. Drewitt would scarcely have recognised him for the pleasant, free-spoken young gentleman who, in spite of his religion, had won her motherly, kind heart.

Also, Mr. Fabian displayed an immense amount of architectural knowledge; he could tell, almost to a year, the date of any piece of especial stonework, and he knew all about rood-screens and *reredos*, and *piscina*, and *sedilia*, and *hagioscope*, and many other strange things, with which the once Protestant Church of England was altogether unfamiliar.

When they returned to the Hall, Aubrey found a letter from his father, almost demanding his speedy return to Southerleigh. "I don't know what you are doing in that out-of-the-way place," wrote Mr. Seaton, of Southerleigh. "I want you *here*! you are my heir still if you are no longer heir of Seatondale. I am ill, far worse

than I was a month ago, and I want my only son for comfort and for companionship. What Father Fabian is up to I cannot imagine; but I don't wish for you to be mixed up with it, whatever it is. William Seaton and I are not friends, still we *are* brothers, and if for good ends he is to be cheated and deluded, I do not care that you, my son, should be a party to the cheat or to the delusion. Leave Father Fabian to carry out his own schemes, to find his own tools; all my children have gone from me—just retribution, perhaps, since it was I who induced your Aunt Agnes to take the veil, to our father's grief and bitter disappointment. But I *will not* let you and Millicent go without a struggle! And I am in England, and England is not yet subject to his Holiness. I have but to appeal to my country against my Church, and there will be such a commotion from John-o'-Groats to Land's-end as has not been known since the downfall of the Stuarts. So come back to me, Aubrey, at once, or mischief will ensue. And don't show this letter to Father Fabian. I am your father, remember, and a son cannot have two fathers any more than a man can serve two masters. This letter is *between ourselves*, and he has nothing to do with it. Lest you should be short of money, I enclose a cheque, which you can get cashed at Lunchester if not at Chalfonts. I suppose the infant is likely to live?"

Whatever Mr. Seaton might say, Aubrey did feel that he had two masters, and he knew that if he failed to show his letter to Father Fabian the omission would be regarded as a cardinal sin, for which he must do penance sooner or later. That night he avoided the priest easily, and after he had locked himself in his room, he remained for a long time in profound meditation. The end of it all was that he read his father's letter again very carefully, and then tore it into pieces, each of which he set alight at the candle. In three minutes a few light ashes—a little tinder rather, lay on the hob of the old-fashioned grate.

"Now," said Aubrey, rising from his knees, after satisfying himself that the letter was entirely consumed, "Father Fabian may storm as long as he pleases, for I have



put it out of my power to disobey my real father. And I will tell my uncle that I must leave Seatondale to-day; as for going to Lunechester, I do not see why I need say anything about that—that is between my father and myself."

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## CHAPTER XI.

### ALMIRA HOUSE.

"'My face is my fortune, sir,' she said."

AND Edith Armstrong, in whom I hope you are a little interested,—what were her experiences at Almira House? Did she think of Aubrey continually, as he thought of her?

Edith had scant leisure to think about anybody, herself included, by day; and at night she was so tired that she fell asleep after very brief meditations. It was well for her that youth and perfectly sound health procured for her the inestimable blessing of unbroken repose, for she had to rise early in the morning, and get through a certain portion of the day's duties before breakfast. Mrs. Augustus Jevons, the lady of Almira House, was no ordinary woman; she was a notable person in her own circle, and much quoted and looked up to by a certain set in the district of St. Peter's, the then genteel suburb of Lunechester. She was active, zealous, eminently religious,—a burning and a shining light, in fact; with a good deal of severity in her nature, and extremely pronounced views on nearly every subject. Mrs. Jevons was the patron of several benevolent institutions; she was on half a dozen committees; she collected for the Bible Society, the Church Missionary Society, the Tract Society, the Pastoral-Aid Society, and the Church Building Society. But her pet society was that for the Conversion of the Jews and their Restoration to Palestine, and so great was her Jewish craze that even her

fondest admirers shuddered, and if possible fled her companionship when she commenced to dilate on the beloved and inexhaustible theme of her Hebrew converts. I need scarcely say that she was both hon. sec. and treasurer of the Ladies' Association of the Lunechester branch of the Society for the Conversion of Israel. Residing not far from the beautifully situated and aristocratic little town of Kirk-by-Lune, which everybody knows is within a few miles of Lunechester, was a certain Lady Sophia Saville, by far the largest subscriber on Mrs. Jevons's list, and her indefatigable correspondent and coadjutor in all good works; and Mrs. Jevons, though she had "given up the world"—whatever so doubtful a phrase may mean—and despised, on principle, all earthly glories and ambitions, was nevertheless partial to titled people, and excessively careful not to offend their little prejudices, and to humour their peculiarities, though making allowances for weakness of any sort was by no means a special feature in Mrs. Jevons's character, as all her household and many of her friends could testify.

The last governess who had been entrusted with the education of the Misses Jevons had, as her patroness declared, sadly lacked the Christian grace of humility; also she thought too much of the vanities and follies of this wicked world, and, not being able to square her notions with those of her pupils' mamma, had somewhat abruptly taken her departure from Almira House, and, what was to the last degree insulting, refrained from requesting Mrs. Jevons's testimonials, when she engaged herself anew. Thus left, with the schoolroom on her hands, as she expressed it, it struck Mrs. Jevons that no instruction could be so efficient, so proper, as the children's own mother; the children would have the best of instruction, and the salary of the governess would be saved.

The plan was tried, and quickly proved a failure. Mrs. Jevons too often forgot the mother in the governess; the dulness of the children amazed her; their idleness and carelessness, and general naughtiness exasperated her; though they were no worse than the average of badly taught and unwisely-trained children—these poor sinful, unregenerate, innately depraved, evil-hearted little Jevonses.

They were always in disgrace, always in tears; punishments were the order of the day; studies did not progress; there were symptoms of recklessness and of insubordination which had never evinced themselves before. Mrs. Jevons was at her wits' end in less than six weeks; besides, she found the secular education of five girls no small strain upon her energies, and her religious correspondence languished for want of time, although the children often had to wait to say their lessons, and knew pretty well that their exercises were frequently returned to them uncorrected. It would not do; it was quite too trying; it impaired her health; and she determined at once to secure another governess, and one who would be amenable to rule, and meekly receive reproof and Christian counsel.

But just then there seemed to be a dearth of governesses, especially of those who professed themselves "meek and humble-minded, and willing to be guided." One or two otherwise desirable ladies objected to Mrs. Jevons herself; and one, who was almost engaged, refused at the eleventh hour to admit to the schoolroom Master Timothy Jevons, aged five years, who was presumed to be just ready to begin on his Latin declensions, though quite unable to read the simplest sentence in his mother tongue. Mrs. Jevons began to despair; the girls had had holiday so long that they were tired of it, and the eldest, just fifteen, prayed that she and her next sister might be sent to school—a request which their mamma regarded as indicative of extreme hardness of heart and want of natural feeling. At last it occurred to Mrs. Jevons—she wondered she had not thought of it sooner—to write to "dear Lady Sophia," and implore her to send to her aid some pious, modest, well-instructed, lady-like, talented, experienced, energetic, highly-principled young person, such as she was sure her ladyship must know in her own favoured circle. By return of post came Lady Sophia's answer. She did know of a "young person," though she could not say that she at all came up to the standard required by Mrs. Jevons. In the first place, she was "*not* a decided Christian;" though so well disposed, that Lady Sophia was anxious for her to be placed under such influences and to enjoy such privileges as would be her blessed lot beneath the roof of her

beloved friend. She was not experienced, never having been out before ; but she was docile, quick to adopt a suggestion, and very well educated. She had resided abroad a good deal, and spoke French "like a native." She was an excellent German scholar, had lived two years at Berlin ; could play and sing beautifully ; draw, paint, &c., &c. As for being ladylike, she was of good birth and breeding, being, in fact, distantly connected by marriage with the Saville family. Finally, Lady Sophia thought that it would be a boon for both employer and employed if her friend Mrs. Jevons, and Edith Armstrong, who was an orphan and homeless, could come to terms. In a postscript Lady Sophia added : "Of course, a very small salary will do for a girl who has absolutely no experience. I am told, too, that her looks are singularly against her ; she has, for a governess, a very unfortunate appearance."

The issue of it was that Edith Armstrong was quickly engaged. She had never seen her august relative, Lady Sophia Saville, though she had received from her at different times a good deal of advice. She intensely disliked the tone of Mrs. Jevons's letters, but it behoved her to "place herself" as speedily as possible, her little stock of money running very low, and the relatives who had given her shelter since her mother's death reminding her almost daily of her dependent position. "I need not stay longer than a year," she said to herself, as she dropped the decisive letter into the post-office, "if I do not like these people. I am not bound to them. I can bear a good deal, and have learned to eat humble-pie without making a wry face, if not with actual relish. At any rate, I shall get a *reference* ; and it seems to me that if an angel came down from heaven and wanted a situation he would have a difficulty in placing himself without references."

What befel Miss Armstrong on her journey from Glasgow to Lunechester, we know, and we left her, or rather Aubrey Seaton left her, at the gates of Almira House, apparently quite composed, but really nervous and depressed, and very much tired with the journey, which had included a three miles' walk across the fields. As she bade Aubrey good-bye, she felt as if she were parting with her last friend, and she shivered as she reverted to her corre-

spondence with Mrs. Augustus Jevons. She looked up at the house that was to be her home: it told her nothing, only in the grey evening light, for it faced the east, it looked cold, formal, and uninviting. Nevertheless, as Edith told herself, while she advanced up the drive, very charming people have lived before now in very ugly houses, and Almira House was not ugly, only it was not exactly pleasant.

The maid who opened the door seemed very much surprised at her arrival without luggage; and she was ushered into what appeared to be the dining-room. The look of the room did not raise Edith's spirits; everything in it was solid, good, expensive even, but tasteless. The chairs did not seem as if they could be sat on; the vast sideboard, and the long mahogany table *without any cloth*, looked inhospitable. If you want to make a room look dreary and unhomelike, keep your tables uncovered, and polish them to the highest degree; I know no better receipt for imparting a chill, ungenial, uncomfortable aspect than this!

As for the bookcases,—and there were two of them, full of handsomely bound books,—Edith thought she could never be sufficiently presumptuous to unlock the glass-doors, and take a volume from the shelves. She had plenty of time to make observations, for the bronze timepiece on the black marble mantel-piece ticked, and ticked, till it had told nearly half an hour before Mrs. Jevons made her appearance. Edith was so foolish as to expect some sort of apology; she did not know that people of Mrs. Jevons's stamp never make apologies to their *inferiors*. She rose as the door opened, and a lady, tall and thin, robed in sad-coloured raiment, entered the room, but she did *not* make the curtsy which was expected of her, and her mistress intuitively took note thereof.

"You are later than I anticipated, Miss Armstrong," said Mrs. Jevons, as she shook hands with five hard, stiff finger-tips; "they waited tea for you in the school-room."

Edith explained, and when she had told her story, Mrs. Jevons shook her head and observed: "A very narrow

escape, Miss Armstrong,—a very providential escape. Think where you might have been at this moment—this *very* moment!”

“I might have been with God!” thought Edith, though she made no rejoinder. “Oh, why is it that good people find life so sweet and death so terrible?”

“Ah! I hope you will take it as a warning,” assumed Mrs. Jevons; “if so, the accident may be a blessing to you.”

“A blessing to me?”

“Yes; if it leads you to *think*!—to think, to feel how uncertain life is.”

“It could not make me feel that more than I have felt it, for several years past.”

“But there is the life beyond.”

“Thank God; *yes*.”

Mrs. Jevons was puzzled, and not quite pleased. This girl had been delivered over to her as an unconverted person, and here she was, speaking with the assurance of “an advanced Christian,” and yet not altogether in proper evangelistic phrase. There was something unorthodox in her very tone; it was too dark to notice how she looked.

“An eternity of woe or of happiness!” said Mrs. Jevons, impressively, but putting characteristically the worst alternative foremost. Edith did not reply; she might, perhaps, have said something, only that she was so very tired and hungry. Almost simultaneously, she thought of the old hymn—“There is beyond the sky,” &c., and wondered when she would be allowed to take off her bonnet, preparatory to having something to eat! She determined not to enter into conversation; indeed, she felt unequal to anything of the kind. She longed almost childishly for a cup of warm tea, or hot, strong coffee, a slice of thick bread and butter, and a boiled egg, with the prospect of going to bed very soon. The accident had shaken her more than she knew, and the walk afterwards had tired her nearly to exhaustion. She had never been faint in her life, but she certainly felt *queer* now, and Mrs. Jevons's words died idly on her ears, while she strove in vain to follow the sense of them. It was an infinite relief when a tall, gawky girl stumbled into the room head foremost,

and called out, "Ma, cook wants to know whether the cutlets are for supper."

"I will see cook," said Mrs. Jevons, rising. "Miss Armstrong, this is your eldest pupil, my daughter Louisa. Louisa, take Miss Armstrong up to her room. Would you like to go to bed at once, Miss Armstrong, or would you prefer to come down to supper?"

"I am very tired," said Edith, faintly, "but I think I must take some supper, or I shall be ill. I have only had a biscuit or two since the morning, and travelling seems to take so much out of one. But if I might have a cup of tea or coffee, with a little bread and butter upstairs, I should be so much obliged!"

"I hope you are not delicate?"

"By no means; I am very strong, but I am so tired to-night, and I suppose the accident must have jarred my nerves a little, though I did not guess it at the time, for I have a headache, which is a very rare event with me."

"I had a delicate governess once," returned Mrs. Jevons; "and she was the plague of my life; she got up late and went to bed early, and was always fatigued, and of course could not do her duty in the schoolroom. A governess ought to have excellent health, and a vigorous constitution."

And Mrs. Jevons sailed away kitchenwards, while Edith followed Louisa upstairs—up, up, up, up, to the topmost story of the house, and into a small, scantily-furnished bedroom under the roof, containing, however, one article with which Edith would gladly have dispensed—a child's crib, and a sturdy boy fast asleep in it.

"This is your room," said Louisa, awkwardly, as she placed the candle on the dressing-table. An uncomfortable, ungainly-looking girl she was, tall and lanky and angular, with long, bony, sleeveless arms, a bony, uncovered, sallow neck, and sharp shoulders perpetually slipping out of the low frock, which seemed far too juvenile for its wearer. Louisa's features were not good, her hair, though abundant, was coarse and ill-arranged, her complexion was rather thick than dark, and the only thing that redeemed this plain face from actual ugliness was a pair of beautiful dark soft eyes. "Dark as night,

and soft as velvet," said Edith to herself, as in the dim candle-light governess and pupil made their mutual inspection—"took stock of each other," as Louisa phrased it afterwards in talking things over with her next sister, Susan.

"Would you not like some warm water?" asked the girl, hesitatingly, but with an evident desire to show kindness and hospitality.

"Thank you, I should like it much," said Edith, feeling very cold and very dirty; after her long journey in an uncleanly second-class carriage, a can of hot water seemed highly desirable. She never imagined that it could possibly be a forbidden luxury. She expected Louisa to ring the bell, and surely any housemaid who knew her duties would understand at once what was required. But there was no bell to ring—governesses are not supposed to require bells—and Louisa looked troubled.

"I will go and fetch you some," she said, nervously. "There is always plenty in the kitchen boiler. I will be back in a minute if mamma is not about."

"Pray do not take the trouble, especially if your mamma would object to your going into the kitchen."

"Oh, she does not mind my going there, though of course I must not stop talking to the servants; it is not *that*, but she never allows hot toilet-water except in cases of illness! She says it is enervating."

"Doubtless she is right; cold water is far more bracing, and much better for young people. I can do very well with what is here. I should not have wished for warm water, only I am so cold, and one does get really dirty on the railroad."

Louisa watched her as she made her toilet, and helped her to unpack, for by this time the luggage had arrived.

"Do you think your mamma will expect me to go down again?" asked Edith, as she took her dressing-gown from the trunk. "I should so like to put this on at once, and have something to eat, and then get into bed. I shall be quite right by morning; sleep always cures my headaches."

"Put on your dressing-gown," said Louisa, in a tone of authority. "You are not one of us, and you may do as



you like in such a little thing, surely! We may do nothing against regular rule, without express permission; but you are the governess. Miss Stanyon always did as she liked. There! make yourself comfortable, Miss Armstrong, and I will take care that you have some supper; and I will come again to see that you are quite comfortable." And so saying, she ran down stairs.

"She is a kind girl, and very well disposed, I am sure," said Edith, as she slowly took off her rusty, dusty black silk, several degrees shabbier than when she started in the morning, and wrapped herself in her dressing-gown and a woollen shawl, for the April night had turned chilly with the sunset, and the attic would have been all the better for a few embers in the grate. But as Mrs. Jevons did not allow warm water in the bedrooms, she was not likely to permit a fire. There was a low chair by the bedside, and Edith nestled down on it, and tried to make herself comfortable, waiting for the ardently desired supper, whatever it might be. Even a basin of bread and milk would be most welcome; though hot, strong coffee was what she really longed for. It was very unheroine-like, I must confess, but Edith, having washed her face and rested a little, thought more of her supper than of the accident on the rails, or of her lonely position and probable trials as Mrs. Jevons's governess, or even of Aubrey himself. Though once or twice as she muffled herself in the folds of her warm shawl, her thought was, "How kind he was, yet how respectful! Shall I ever see him again, I wonder? Probably not, though one never knows. Well, God bless him for his kindness to a stranger. I am sure he is a good young man."

And then came the greatly-needed refreshment, good coffee, plenty of cold toast, and a most delicious cutlet. Edith did not know that Louisa had as good as stolen that cutlet from the downstairs supper; she had had quite a battle with the cook before she could persuade her to let it go, for the new governess's supper. There it was, however, very nicely served. Louisa had seen to that, and Edith enjoyed it most unsentimentally. And then, with a brief prayer—for she was too drowsy to think connectedly for more than a few seconds together—she fell asleep, and

only awoke when the sun was shining, and Master Timothy sitting up in his crib, and clamouring to be dressed.

"You had better go to the nursery," said Edith, trying to collect her faculties.

"No," cried the young gentleman; "ma says you're to dress me, 'cos I make such a riot in the nursery. Get up! I want to be dressed; I want to play with my new whip."

Edith had not bargained for nursery work, and the child's demand affected her unpleasantly. She reflected, however, that it would be very foolish to begin with a protest, and that it would not be very troublesome or difficult to wash and dress the little fellow, who had jumped from his crib, and was already struggling with his socks, looking extremely pretty in his white nightgown, with chubby hands, dimpled white knees, and a rosy, merry face. Master Timothy was the only son, the heir and hope of the house of Jevons. Strange to say, he had all the beauty which his seven sisters lacked, for there were two feminine dots in the nursery, besides the five girls in the schoolroom. Decidedly Mrs. Jevons had her quiver full! and Mr. Jevons also, of course, if there were any such person! But Edith had heard no allusion to any possible master of the establishment; Mrs. Jevons had not once said "my husband;" he was not mentioned in her letters, and Louisa had not made the slightest reference to "*papa*." And yet, as it soon appeared from Master Timothy's artless prattle, there was a baby in the nursery, intent on cutting its teeth—Timothy's "*last little sister*." And though Mrs. Jevons was arrayed in dark-hued garments, she carried with her no insignia of widowhood, nor did the family seem to be in any kind of mourning. So all things considered, there probably *was* a Mr. Jevons, and Edith immediately pictured him as a weak, humble-minded little man, bowing to the superior wisdom of his wife. Her doubts were set at rest when the child knelt down at her knee to say his morning prayer, which included the orthodox petition, "Pray God, bless *papa* and *mamma*, and all my sisters, and make me a good boy, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen." Of course, then, Mr. Augustus Jevons was still in the flesh, since his little son prayed for him.

Having sent Master Timothy downstairs, Edith proceeded with her own toilet. She put on her only morning dress of a soft grey material, a neat, cambric "habit shirt," such as ladies wore in those days; she twisted her rich, dark hair into coils at the back of her head, and smoothly braided it in front. Nothing could be simpler; her garb was almost Quakerish, and yet she looked perfectly attired. One little knot of carnation-coloured ribbon was the only bit of brightness about her, so far as her raiment was concerned. But the good night's rest had brought back the delicate roses, and filled her luminous eyes with a sweet, hopeful light, for she was one who naturally looked at the sunny side of things, and was more inclined to count up her mercies than to number her trials and vexations.

She went downstairs to look for Louisa, the fairest sight that Almira House had seen for many a day.

Now Mrs. Jevons had told her husband over night, while they supped together, that the new governess was come; and Mr. Jevons had replied, for the want of anything better to say—

"And what does she look like, my dear?"

To which "my dear" made answer: "I could not see what she looked like, for I only saw her in the dusk, and she was very tired and dull; but dear Lady Sophia informs me that she is singularly plain,—so plain as to be almost forbidding, I gather from her letter. And I am glad of that; beauty is a snare—even moderate good looks are a temptation; so prepare yourself for something little short of actual ugliness."

"I am sorry now, for I like a pretty face." A most unguarded speech, since never, even in her *première jeunesse*, could Mrs. Jevons have been at all "pretty." And her husband knew, or ought to have known, that in her eyes prettiness was next to wickedness. She administered a brief but stern rebuke, and Mr. Jevons concentrated his attention on his cutlets and dry sherry.

What was the lady's dismay when next morning she met Edith, and discovered the fact of her unquestionable beauty. Yes; beauty! it was far more than mere prettiness! What *could* Lady Sophia have meant? Reading

the letter again, Mrs. Jevons quickly perceived what she must have meant—that her *protégée* was far too handsome for her dependent position. Edith got but a cool greeting; she did not guess what an offence her face was, nor how it prejudiced her patroness against her. Whether that lovely face was to be her fortune or her misfortune time will show.

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## CHAPTER XII.

"'TIS SHE, OR NONE ON EARTH."

"Be thou content to find the narrow way,  
 Made plain for thee to walk in day by day;  
 Serve thou thy God with heart, and soul, and might;  
 Darkness and doubt are wrong, belief is right.  
 To him that seeketh, God vouchsafeth light;  
 But think not that which seemeth right to thee  
 Must needs be so for all men. Thou canst see  
 Footprints of light upon the world's highway,  
 Left there by Him who had not where to lay  
 His lonely head—the plainest, nearest thee;  
 Duty is plain unto sincerity.  
 There may be footprints which thou canst not see,  
 Made plain by Heaven's light to other men;  
 Jesus went many ways unto Jerusalem."

NOTWITHSTANDING poor Edith's "unfortunate personal appearance," she managed to make a tolerably good impression on her exacting patroness. As the days passed, and the new governess worked diligently in the school-room, and meekly submitted to perpetual interference, without giving herself any of the airs of a beauty, or endeavouring to attract attention, or seeming conscious even of her superior charms, Mrs. Jevons began to conclude that the handsome face might be tolerated on the ground of general suitability in other respects. "And you see," said Mrs. Jevons, apologetically, when she was talking the matter over one day with Mrs. John Slater,

her own particular crony, "the girl really cannot help having such a complexion, and a straight nose and pencilled eyebrows; and as she is modest and retiring, and not the least bit of a coquette, as far as I can discover—and I have watched her very keenly—I do not see that she is to blame any more than if she squinted, or were pitted with the small-pox—as I wish to my heart she were, for her own sake, for beauty is *such* a snare; we are expressly told that favour is deceitful, and that beauty is vain! So, if she goes on as she has begun, I shall keep her; she really has a good method with the children, and is—her youth taken into account—quite competent. And then, I have no grown-up son to make a simpleton of himself."

"But you have a husband!" replied foolish Mrs. Slater. "I would not have such a pretty, such a *very* pretty girl in my house, even if she required no salary, and paid for her own washing!"

"Mr. Jevons is to be trusted," returned Mrs. Jevons, colouring with annoyance. "My husband is not a Christian man, as you are unfortunately aware—he has never experienced a saving change in his soul—is not a *converted* character, in short; but he is to be trusted, for he is strictly conscientious, and would scorn even the appearance of wrong. Besides, I flatter myself, my husband finds in *his* wife something far more desirable than mere personal beauty, and which is very seldom united with it. I could trust *my* husband in a wilderness full of Helens and Cleopatras."

And she did the good man no more than justice. He was not, in his wife's estimation, "a converted character," because he had not passed through, as far as he could ascertain, certain processes which she believed herself to have experienced; nevertheless, Augustus Jevons, albeit dull and common-place, was a good man in very truth, and religion—though under a far different guise than that accredited by his better half—was to him a great and ever present reality. His wife had not lived with him for more than sixteen years without ascertaining that he was truthful, honest, just, and singularly kind-hearted. He was devout, too, after his fashion, and generous; she was never mulct in her charities by him, and he gave of his

substance freely, and as God had prospered him. Only—"only!" she told herself, and her most intimate friends—indeed, she said it to his children and to Edith—"he lacked the one thing needful,—a saving faith."

Which he did *not*, but he showed his faith in a way which his wife could not in the least understand, and which she and her clique stigmatised as "*legal*." It never occurred to these good ladies that souls were as diverse as faces, and that God deals with no two souls in His kingdom of grace in precisely the same manner. The spirits of the just are not moulded to one set pattern; uniformity is not God's law. Said an old Scotch Puritan, "The Master on us, a' has mony mair mools in His workshop—than He's tell't to you and to me aboot." A truth we are sadly slow to learn, and failing which we pain many a tender heart, and do, I am afraid, a great deal more harm than good—perhaps even offend and hinder some who are feeling after God and trying to find Him, and slowly turning their faces Zionwards. Woe to those who point out their own way, however excellent, and say to others, "This is the only road to heaven, walk ye in it." I cannot refrain from speaking on this subject when opportunity affords, because I have known much sorrow and much mischief to ensue from the well-intentioned efforts of really Christian people, who would persist in narrowing the Lord's way to the limited compass of their own unexpanded conceptions of God's grace, and in expounding truth from their own one-sided view of it.

As for Mrs. Slater, she was blessed with a husband who was altogether a scapegrace. Some of his relations said that he might have been a very different man if he had married a woman who had any conception of wifely duties. With the Slaters, however, we have nothing to do, except as from time to time Mrs. Jevons confided to her certain matters which transpired at Almira House.

Mrs. Jevons, as I remarked, was a singularly energetic person; one of those busy, active women who seem never tired, never needing rest, going without pause from one occupation to one another, and happy only in ceaseless doing. But her industrious habits were rather trying to her household, and her servants continually gave her

notice, not because their work was too heavy, but because they were wearied and fretted with perpetually keeping up to the mark, for no one in the family was allowed to sit for a minute with folded hands between the hours of rising and bedtime. And "early to rise" was one of the maxims on which Mrs. Jevons insisted; in the summer servants and children were alike astir with the lark, and vied with the milkman in taking their walks abroad; in the winter they had family prayers and breakfasted by candlelight. And then the labours of the day commenced; every hour brought its appointed task, and woe betide any loiterer detected in the heinous crime of enjoying a little surreptitious leisure. The mistress did not preach what she did not practise, nor require of those under her rule more than she herself performed. She never indulged in *siestas*, however brief; no ten minutes' grace in the morning, when the alarm in her bedroom rang out its noisy peal; no "forty winks" after the busiest long morning could ever be laid to her account. Edith was quite ashamed of herself when sometimes in the afternoon she felt so sleepy that she could have dozed over Mary's French verbs and Fanny's scales; altogether it was very much like being on a refined sort of treadmill, for the monotony of teaching wearied her exceedingly. Her greatest pleasure was walking with her pupils, at a prescribed hour, on the breezy moors and pleasant uplands which rise for miles and miles till they terminate in a range of high dark fells on that side of Luncheon. Also, the Wednesday evening service at St. Peter's was a comfort—it was such a rest, though the sermons were not of a very enlivening character.

As for the children, they were, in Edith's estimation, wonderfully good; they were obedient and respectful, and when alone with her, affectionate. But they were terribly backward in nearly every branch of study, and they were certainly rather dull. Louisa and Susan both tried to do their best; Fanny and Mary, next in age, were docile but uninteresting, and extremely difficult to teach; Rose, the seven-years-old child, seemed decidedly stupid, and systematically forgot on the morrow all that she had learned with infinite pain to-day. The younger children, Edith

thought, were allowed too little play, the elder girls too little liberty.

Master Timothy, who was his mother's darling, was an exception; he romped, and shouted, and racketed about to his heart's content. He was really a fine boy, and full of fun and mischief; wherefore, he was, to a great extent, banished from the nursery, where it was affirmed that he was unmanageable and obnoxious to the babies, who were continually crying and screaming when he was their companion. So, on the representation of the much-aggrieved nurse, he was turned over to the schoolroom, where, though he gave a good deal of trouble, he was also the source of a great deal of amusement, the pet and plaything of both governess and sisters.

"I know you think us shocking dunces, Miss Armstrong," said Louisa, one day, when a simple French exercise was returned to her, full of faults; "for one thing, we are *not* bright, and my memory is very bad; and then, we have had so many governesses, and have been taught on so many systems, that half our time has been taken up in unlearning, and so everything seems to be in confusion. Miss Stanyon stayed with us nine months; that was quite an age."

"Indeed! I hope I shall stay rather longer."

"I am sure I hope so, too; we have never had any one so kind to us, and so clever, and you don't seem to think it your duty to be always carrying tales to mamma, and complaining of our idleness and carelessness, and general good-for-nothingness. There was Miss Turley, we were always in trouble in her time; and Miss Bellman, who was always talking about her method, which *we* never could understand; and Miss Clupp, who was good-natured, but so silly, and in love with the curate; and Miss Dell, and ever so many more. Some of them only stayed a few weeks. And then mamma taught us; and that was worst of all, for we never knew when she would be ready for us, and everything seemed in a muddle. I was very glad when I heard you were to come; do stay till my education is finished, there's a dear!"

"I cannot make any promises," said Edith, smiling; "but I assure you I have every wish to remain at present."



I do not like changes, and I have no other home. Besides, though I might easily find more talented and quicker pupils, I tell you honestly, I do not believe I could ever have any who wish to give me so little trouble, and to be so kind and sisterly in their behaviour."

"Papa told us we ought to look upon you as an elder sister, to be both loved and honoured; and we like you so much, Susie and I, that it is quite easy to feel so. Did you know, Miss Armstrong, that papa is very good—one of the best of men?"

"I have no doubt of it; he looks good, and he is kind and thoughtful for others."

"And yet mamma says he is unconverted; he is not a Christian!"

"I think perhaps she is mistaken, just because she is so very anxious on his account as she is on yours. But, my dear Louisa, do not let us discuss the religious state of any person. Our concern is with ourselves,—you and I, who are both young and liable to error; let us try to be true Christians, to live to God, to do His will, to bear patiently any trouble that comes to us, and, above all, to do good to others in every way we can."

"But, Miss Armstrong, I am not converted; I am not a Christian."

"Do you not wish to be one, Louisa?"

"Of course I do. Who would not wish to escape eternal misery?"

"That is a very poor way of looking at it, my dear; I heard a very good man who lives at Derwent-town say, the other day, that if we thought less about saving our souls, and more about doing God's will, there would be much more true Christianity in the world."

"But mamma says that we cannot keep the law, that the law only leads to death and ruin."

"Never mind the law. Strive to do God's will."

"What is the difference?"

"It is immense. You may keep the law to a certain extent, because you dare not do otherwise; just as if I laid down severe rules which you obeyed because you knew that disobedience would be severely punished. But if, on the other hand, you strove to please me because you loved

me, you would do a great deal more than just observe mere rules. Do you understand? A rebellious slave may keep his master's law; only a loving child can do his father's will. It was Christ Himself who said, 'Lo, I come to do Thy will, O My God!'

"But only Christ could do God's will."

"Only Christ could do it perfectly; but, unless we, with our whole hearts, long to do God's will, we are not real Christians. To do a person's will is a far higher expression of love and obedience than merely keeping certain laws which he has issued. You know we say continually in the prayer which our blessed Lord Himself taught us, '*Thy will be done.*'"

"I thought that meant resignation."

"It means a great deal more; it means that we ask God to let His will be done by us, as well as in us."

"But how can we know the will of God?"

"He shows it to us if we really want to know it. It is His will that we should love Him, and love each other. That will do for a grand principle,—the little things, or what we call little things, unfold themselves as we go on our way."

"But are you not anxious to save your soul?"

"No! because I believe that God has saved it for me. My chief concern is to live to His glory,—to please Him."

"But mamma says my *heart* must be changed before I can do any good thing!"

"Perhaps it is changed?"

"Oh, *no*! I have not had the experience I read about in books."

"Tell me, Louisa, do you wish to serve God, and to be in communion with Him, to live to His glory, and to feel His love?"

"I do, indeed, and I think I do try to please Him, only I so often forget and please myself instead."

"Why do you try to please Him?"

"Because I am sure He loves me. Because I want to be with Him for ever and ever."

"Then I think your heart *is* changed, for there must have been a time when you did not care about God?"

"That there was, and not so long ago, either. . I always cared about *hell*,—but that is quite different."

"Quite! I am glad you feel that. The fear of hell is *not* religion. Always remember that, Louisa. I think you are very fond of your papa? Now, if you only obeyed him in a certain thing to avoid the punishment which you dreaded, he would scarcely prize your obedience. He would say, 'My daughter does not love me, does not understand me; she would do the forbidden thing, but for the consequences!' But if you rendered the same obedience out of pure love and gratitude to him from whom you had received so many favours, he would say, 'I have my dear child's heart; her will and mine are the same, and she loves me because I first loved her.' And it is so with your Heavenly Father, Louisa, only His love and tenderness are beyond all comparison."

"At any rate I may try to please God?—converted or unconverted; that *must* be right."

"No doubt about it. If your face is turned towards God, all is well with you."

"I think, if one is prepared, it must be happy to die young."

"It is happiness to die or to live, as God wills it. We may live in Him as well as die in Him. The dead in Christ are happy in their rest, in their new life with Him; the living are happy in their *work*. Life is a glorious thing, Louisa."

"And yet people say how sad it is."

"The saddest things are sometimes the best; the greatest joy comes out of the deepest sorrow; but that you cannot understand yet."

"And you—you are not so many years older than I am—not more than five or six?"

"Five or six years is a long time in a young life, and our minds and souls grow more between fifteen and twenty than in all the other years that come before. And I have known great sorrow, Louisa. One learns so much in a few months, sometimes."

Louisa would frequently have held similar conversations, but Edith, knowing how widely she and Mrs. Jevons differed in their estimate of Christianity, avoided saying more

than she could help. And she said to her pupil, "My dear, let us live religion; we will not talk it."

Nearly a month had passed since she came to Almira House, and she made the best of her situation. She had never in her life encountered a person like Mrs. Jevons, so austere good, so dogmatic, so narrow-minded, so humble in her creed and profession of faith, and so full of pride and self-assertion in her daily life. For she was one of that class who are loudest in proclaiming themselves "miserable sinners" *en masse*, but who never own themselves to be really wrong in any single respect. And yet Mrs. Jevons "got on," as she phrased it, with her governess far better than with any of those who had preceded her. She never guessed what discipline it was to Edith to bend herself continually and unrepiningly to an inferior mind, nor how heavily from day to day the dull monotony of her life pressed on her spirits.

One afternoon, when Mrs. Jevons was busy with one of her committee meetings, Louisa, who had been practising on the drawing-room piano, came upstairs, all breathless, crying, "Miss Armstrong, Miss Armstrong! There's a gentleman downstairs waiting to see you."

"To see me?" replied Edith. "There is some mistake, I think. Yet it is just possible; did you see the visitor, Louisa?"

"To be sure I did. I was playing that noisy *Concerto*, and I had the *forte* pedal down, to drown the brass-band out in the road, and he was shown into the room before I knew that I was no longer alone. I stopped with a crash, and then he asked for you, and I ran away, and Martha told me to give you this card."

The card, as you will expect, was Aubrey Seaton's. But that told Edith nothing, though, with a strange intuition, she guessed the truth. It had so happened that Aubrey had not mentioned his name to her; and but for the difficulty of the luggage, he would certainly have remained in ignorance of hers, nor would he have known her address. Till the last moment he had despaired of paying this visit, for Father Fabian had signified his intention of travelling with him to London, where he had an appointment with his superior, and where he wished to make certain pur-

chases with a view to the furnishing of Malham Tower. He had lost not a day in turning the workmen into it, and giving the preliminary orders.

But just as Aubrey was ready for the journey, Father Fabian was so unlucky as to sprain his ankle through catching his foot in a large vermin-trap. In after days, there were persons who, recollecting this small episode, wished the trap had been big enough to catch him bodily, and strong enough to hold him fast for the remainder of his life. So Aubrey was necessarily permitted to depart alone, and he was further entrusted with dispatches to the superior of Father Fabian's order in London, and charged to make all speed until they were delivered. For the first time since his childhood, he deliberately disobeyed his spiritual adviser. Instead of taking a through ticket, he took one to Lunchester only; and this time, without let or hindrance, soon found himself in the shadow of the old feudal castle, and on his way to Almira House.

Though what he had to say to Edith, he could not exactly tell, and he was not at all sure that he had any right to intrude himself upon her, unless he came to speak that which commonest prudence and plainest sense told him could not be spoken. It was impossible that he could at once ask her to be his wife—a girl whom he had seen but once, of whose antecedents he was entirely ignorant, and who was, moreover—a *heretic*! That was the worst part of it; he could never marry one who was not of his own communion. Why, she might be a dreadful *Metho-dist* for aught he knew, or something equally obnoxious. He almost hoped that Edith might be out; then he would take her absence as 'a sign that he was not to prosecute the acquaintance. Nevertheless, a rush of delight came over him when Mrs. Jevons's housemaid informed him that Miss Armstrong was at home, and without more ado ushered him into the drawing-room.

"Is this gentleman young or old?" asked Edith, feeling, however, tolerably certain of the answer.

"Oh, young, quite young," responded Louisa, readily, "and so tall and handsome, and with a deep ringing voice. Make haste! but won't you put on a lace collar?—that tucker is rather crumpled."

"No, it does not matter. I suppose I ought to see Mr. Seaton."

"Of course you ought! What a charming name. There are Seatons of Seatondale, you know, not so far from Chalfonts, on the other side of the Channel. And they are very grand people, I believe; one of the oldest families in the North, I have heard papa say. Oh, dear, I wish you had your silk on."

"Don't be foolish, Louisa," laughed the young governess. "It is very kind of you, but I assure you I am quite content with my dress, tucker and all, though I really must teach Timothy not to spoil my finery." And in another minute she was on the stairs, feeling a little embarrassed in spite of herself, and wondering, too, what Mrs. Jevons would say when she came to hear of her gentleman visitor. She was not at all certain whether governesses were allowed to receive callers, nor whether she might not get into some tremendous scrape, and be charged with having shamefully outraged the proprieties. And yet she could not feel sorry that Aubrey Seaton had taken the trouble to come to see her.

She opened the drawing-room door, and there, turning over Louisa's music, she beheld her fellow-traveller of that eventful day. If the young man had admired her then, he thought her ten times lovelier now. In her simple dress she was most charming; he would have liked to sit still and gaze at her, as at a beautiful picture, for what to talk about he could not imagine. Suddenly it struck him that it had been all along his duty to call and inquire of her welfare, since he and she had shared that common peril, and she might have been injured more than at first appeared. So he accounted for his presence on that score, and Edith thanked him, and replied that she was not in any way the worse, that her luggage had safely arrived the same night, and that she owed him many thanks for his kindness and attention; all of which he, of course, disclaimed, saying with perfect truth that he had never done anything with greater pleasure in his life. And then Edith asked if he had been in the neighbourhood ever since their meeting and parting, and it came out that he had just arrived from Seatondale.

"Then you are one of the Seatondale Seaton's?" said Edith, remembering what Louisa had told her.

"No," he replied, "I am of the younger branch—a Southerleigh Seaton, which makes all the difference, I can assure you."

She did not ask what difference, though she longed to know. He, on his part, wanted to tell her that he was a Catholic, and could not manage to do it without seeming irrelevant and abrupt; and, after all, what was it to her? She could not care about the religion he professed, except in a general, kindly sort of way, for he was sure that, heretic or no heretic, she was very good, and full of all sweet, kind, womanly charities. He lingered till he was ashamed, saying very little to any purpose, except that he gave her his sister Millicent's address, in case she might at any time suddenly need a friend. He went away, feeling that he had gained nothing by the interview; but as he wound once more down the dusty Burnthorpe-road on his way back to the station, he was repeating to himself, again and again, Schiller's words, "'Tis she, or none on earth."

And "*she*," with all her grace and beauty, was a governess, no match for a Seaton—worse still, she was a heretic. He determined to open a correspondence with her on controversial subjects with a view to her conversion. Aubrey had not the slightest doubt of his Church's claims, and he quite believed that Protestants, when pushed, had not a word to say for their false creed.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

## ELECTIVE AFFINITIES.

"*Ars est celare artem.*"

You must not, however, suppose that General Seaton was a man credulous and easily imposed upon, because his new tenant of Malham Tower succeeded so well in passing himself off as a clergyman of the Anglican Church. On the contrary, he was by no means accustomed to take things for granted; he received new impressions slowly; he was fond of argument, and liked to be thoroughly persuaded in his own mind before he accepted any particular point of theology, or politics, or philosophy; in fact, he was not without a tendency to scepticism, and he could be cynical enough upon occasion.

And yet, you will say, he opened his house, and, to use a common figure of speech, his arms, without hesitation to a man who came to him with a lie in his mouth, and treason in his right hand. Just so; but then General Seaton, who himself would as soon have condescended to shop-lifting or to forgery as to telling a deliberate lie, could not suspect falsehood in others. He was the soul of honour; justice and integrity were as natural to him as breathing. That a gentleman born and bred, a scholar, erudite, accomplished, and highly cultured, should lie, cheat, conspire, assume a character to which he had no right, would have seemed to the honourable-minded, inflexible soldier a sheer and monstrous impossibility. That is, it would have so appeared, had he considered the subject at all, which, of course, he never did. A noble soul abhors suspicion, and indeed cannot, except under constraint, suspect any one, far less an equal, and a person whose acting is the perfection of art. The General as firmly believed in "*noblese oblige*," as in any text of Holy Writ, and I rather think he held to the theory of verbal inspiration. He could not imagine fraud, deceit, and trickery, in any but the



lowest ranks of life, and he would not have retained a servant in his employ whom he detected in an attempt to cheat or in any kind of falsehood. The General's word was his oath; all men knew that; he was stern, crotchety, not very sweet-tempered, "obstinate to pig-headedness," whispered his retainers, occasionally, but inflexibly, unimpeachably just and true.

You will understand, then, how easy it was for the Rev. John Fabian to carry out his purpose. He was not a poor man—nay! he was evidently wealthy—and it could not be supposed that he located himself in Seatondale for any personal advantage. He liked seclusion and beautiful scenery, he wished to enjoy some years of uninterrupted study; many men had played the hermit before him, and a rich man may always indulge his little whim, reasonable or unreasonable, without drawing upon himself any weight of adverse criticism. Then he came, as it were, with credentials; for his connection with Aubrey was a guarantee that he really was the person he claimed to be, and the General knew as well as he knew his own pedigree that his brother Francis had married a lady of English parentage, but of Italian birth, and half Italian blood, and connected with a certain well-born and very wealthy family of Fabians. That there should be a Protestant among them rather surprised him at the outset, because he had always understood that Seaton of Southerleigh had taken his wife out of a family famed for their intense bigotry, and Romanists to their hearts' core. Still, there was the fact! Mr. Fabian declared himself a clergyman of the Church of England, and Aubrey, as he made no counter-statement, endorsed the imposition; indeed, in that letter which had been dictated to him, and which to write had revolted his whole nature, he had himself implied the bare-faced lie; I say *implied*, because the priest so framed the sentence that spoke of him as being an Anglican as to give it, if required, a contrary interpretation. Jesuit-like, he always calculated possibilities, and left a loophole through which at any time he could creep and extricate himself. That Aubrey should deceive, was the last idea to present itself to the General: he was a Seaton, and that was enough. Popish or Protestant, he must necessarily speak the truth.

Nor was this all. The man himself would have deceived even the most guarded and suspicious person. Even if strict inquiries had been made (they had been and would be provided for), nothing but what was favourable to Mr. Fabian would have transpired: his name was on the Clergy List, and these Oxford and Cambridge Fabians were in very truth his distant relatives, though they had never heard of his existence, and scarcely he of theirs. He was unknown in the North country; the Lake District was not then, as now, annually invaded by armies of tourists and excursionists; besides, Seatondale was quite out of the ordinary tourists' track, and there was no St. Ulpha's railway for more than a dozen years after Mr. Fabian's arrival in the neighbourhood. At that time Seatondale and its whole vicinity was as difficult of access as if it had been in the wilderness, and the majority of educated people had never even heard of such a place. It was only casually mentioned in one or two guide-books. Finally, Mr. Fabian was rich, of noble presence, and of undeniable high breeding: had he been poor, mean-looking, uneducated, or ungentelemanly, it would have been quite another thing. There was the unmistakable stamp, which the General, for all his long seclusion, knew as well as any courtier; and thus it came to pass, quite naturally, that all the Jesuit's statements and professions were received—first by General Seaton, and afterwards by others—without one query, or one faintest shadow of mistrust.

And the man lied superbly, and played his part to perfection. He said not a syllable too much; he left no necessary word unsaid. He had no doubts of himself; it was in this sort of thing that he lived, moved, and had his being; and he was supported by unseen and powerful backers, to whom money was nothing, and who were as well practised as himself in strategy and cunning. I think if anybody at that period had had misgivings, his quiet dignity, his great simplicity of speech and manner would have put them instantly to rest. It was his *rôle* to be reticent—reticence, indeed, was his nature—and he always let Nature have her way, with due regard to prudence, because, as he told himself, "Nature is so natural." At the same time, he resolved to be very frank when ques-

tioned—that is, frank in his own interpretation of the word : he would tell *lies* freely ; for, mask it how you will, it came to that. The only weak places in his armour of strategy were his doubts respecting the two Southerleigh Seatons—father and son. How far would Mr. Seaton consent to be a party to deceiving his brother, even though a heretic ? And how far would Aubrey, till now so dutiful, so childlike, obey orders ?

For the present, he thought, all was safe. Aubrey was gone, and had made no awkward revelations, had dropped no hint that might awaken inconvenient reflections ; he had done his part, reluctantly enough, but he had done it. And things being as they were, he must not return to Seatondale for many a day. It was better that he and the General should be entirely separated. Though of different creeds, and most diversely trained, they were both Seatons, and that would go for a great deal, and bridge over much that was antagonistic between them, as he was well aware. As for Francis Seaton, there was not much to be apprehended from him ! He was an invalid and a hypochondriac : he was a slave to Rome, as perverts nearly always are ; he did not love Father Fabian—nay ! he secretly hated and deeply distrusted him—but he *dared not* openly revolt, and the priest knew that right well. Besides, his days were numbered ; he was the victim of a mortal disease, the ravages of which had already told upon both mind and body ; and, for the rest, it was only a question of time—perhaps not many months, certainly not longer than a year or two. Fatal malady and quack doctors would soon dispose of Seaton of Southerleigh ; he would never interfere with the great play that was to be played out at Seatondale !

I have said that Father Fabian *lied superbly* ! You shall judge. Up to the time of Aubrey's departure he had rather avoided explanatory conversations with his host, for Aubrey might, by design, or out of pure accident, say something damaging, and so drop the spark which should set fire to the slow match that would be pretty sure ere-while to explode the mine. It was easy to choose or to reject certain themes and to parry thrusts, for the General was too much of a gentleman to interrogate a guest, and

he had certain old-fashioned ideas of hospitality which would have sealed his lips under any circumstances. But Aubrey once fairly out of the way, Mr. Fabian began to reflect that the sooner explanations were over the better; the sooner he took his standing the more quickly would his position be established. Therefore, on the very evening of the young man's departure, he contrived to lead the General into such currents of talk as were advisable.

Dinner was over, and the two gentlemen were loitering over their wine, in a small parlour, where the meal had been served on Mr. Fabian's account. His ankle was so much swollen that he could not put it to the ground, and this parlour and another room adjoining it had been arranged for his constant occupation. His couch had been wheeled near the bay-window, which commanded the lovely prospect from the terrace; the General's arm-chair was opposite, and a small table, with wine and fruit on it, stood between them. Twilight was falling, soft and grey; a bright little fire burned and crackled in the grate; it was just the hour for confidential communications of any kind. It is so much easier to talk, even when there is nothing to hide or to distort, in a dim, subdued light, than in the glare of noonday; and a good dinner, and a glass or two of generous wine, such as the General's cellars supplied, are certainly no bad preparatives.

"Ah! by-the-way!" said the General, when the conversation had reached a certain point, "you never told me your exact connection with Aubrey's family; you are his uncle, he says; but I don't see——"

"No, no! not his uncle. He did not *say* I was, did he? Though, from a child, that is what he always has called me. I am his *cousin*—second or third cousin, I don't know which, for I never properly mastered the degrees of affinity. You never met Mrs. Francis Seaton, I think?"

"Only once—soon after her marriage; I did not like the connection; though it was no business of mine. Well! Francis and his wife literally stormed over my second marriage; so it was a Roland for an Oliver, eh?"

"Just so; let me, if I can, make it clear. Aubrey's mother, your sister-in-law, and my father, John Antonio Fabian, were first cousins, and in their early youth were

betrothed by parental arrangement, and without any reference to their own inclinations. Theresa, as she grew older, had scruples of conscience, because her cousin and herself were within the prohibited degrees, and could not be united till a Papal dispensation should be procured. I dare say you know the Church of Rome, except under especial circumstances of extraordinary expediency, does not sanction the marriage of cousins, however remote the degree. Though if the *expediency* be proved, a dispensation, mind you, is always to be obtained, especially if the parties are rich and influential, as in this case. The truth was Theresa Talbot did not love her cousin, John Fabian, and she did love Francis Seaton, who, on his part, was desperately enamoured of her.

“Now my father, who had never been an ardent lover—it was his manifest indifference that first piqued Theresa, I think—when he became fully aware of his cousin’s repugnance to the match, determined to break it off without much ado. So the engagement was cancelled, very much to the chagrin of the Talbots, who wished to unite certain properties; but when Mr. Seaton, of Southerleigh, formally proposed, their regret was greatly lessened, for he was of course a most eligible *parti*; and Theresa herself having declared in his favour, there was nothing more to be required, and they were betrothed with the full sanction of all concerned. My father did not wait for their wedding, but chose for himself, and almost immediately married a beautiful Venetian lady, who became my mother in less than a year afterwards. I was their only child; Aubrey, as you are aware, was the youngest but one of Francis Seaton’s numerous offspring; therefore, though we are the children of the same generation, I am nearly twenty years his senior; and from the first he and his sister Millicent learned to look upon me rather as an uncle than as a cousin. Of young Francis I knew very little; he was about my age. The elder daughters so early chose a religious life that I never became at all intimate with them. But Aubrey, who has always looked up to me, is as a dear son; and when I heard of his disappointment, I, being at liberty and travelling for my health, hastened at once to him, hoping to soothe his very

natural vexation. That is how I came to be with him at Chalfonts."

Now, a great part of this story was actual and uncontrovertible truth, as General Seaton knew; for he remembered—though the fact had long slipped from his memory—to have heard that his brother's wife had been previously betrothed to a cousin—her cousin Fabian. There were one or two other points that would have broken down before an ordinary cross-examination; but they were not of any great importance, and they were not likely to be brought in question. This family history, as a whole, could be substantiated, and, having so much truth in its composition, was a guarantee for a great deal more that was unmitigated falsehood. A sprinkling of truth, you know, leavens a mass of untruth:—

"A lie which is all a lie may be met and fought with outright;  
But a lie which is part a truth is a harder matter to fight."

"But," said the General, while he daintily peeled his apple, "how is it that you are a Protestant? And, being such, how did you come to acquire such influence over young Aubrey Seaton?"

"My mother, though an Italian, professed the Reformed faith," replied Fabian, calmly; "and she won over my father to the same way of thinking. He was never a very sound Protestant, as the phrase is commonly understood, his views being nearly those of the present advanced Oxford school; but I was left entirely to my mother's training. She was devoted to the Church of Geneva; my father was a Lutheran, and we lived chiefly abroad—in the south of France or Italy, for my mother could not bear our chilly northern climate. My parents both died before I attained my majority, and I resolved to enter the Church, and at once came to England for necessary study."

"Still I am curious to know how it was that Francis—as great a bigot and as superstitious a fool as ever drew breath—permitted such close intimacy between you and his son, whose perversion, or conversion as we should call it, would have broken his heart?"

Fabian shrugged his shoulders.

"I have often—looking on circumstances—wondered myself," he replied. "It was to be, I suppose. That sounds fatalistic, though, and I am no fatalist; though I do believe that there is a Divinity shaping all our ways, rough-hew them how we will. And Providence ordained that Aubrey should come under my influence. After the foolish engagement between them was broken off, there existed a very brotherly and sisterly affection between my father and Mrs. Francis Seaton; it was therefore natural that their children should be friends. And as for conversion, I never tried it on with Aubrey; honour forbade anything of the kind. I influenced him in philosophy, literature, and politics, and I could do so the more readily from my many Catholic associations; but on religious matters I never interfered, and I vowed that I never would, while his father lived. At the same time, Aubrey and I are more at one on these subjects than you would perhaps imagine. Knowing you to be, shall I say, an *ultra*-Protestant? he, of course, out of respect, would keep his own sentiments in abeyance."

"Nay, nay, I am not an *ultra*-Protestant. I am not of the raving, rabid multitude who believe that the Jesuits are in every family, and that the Catholic Emancipation Bill lighted the torch that shall one day rekindle the fires of Smithfield. But I confess I am *strongly* Protestant, a thorough anti-Romanist, and, as I have told you, the prospect of these broad lands falling into the hands of a Popish heir filled me with sorrow and dismay."

"And well it might! That, however, you are spared. I saw little missy this morning, and she looked quite sprightly. Her nurse says she never knew a healthier babe."

"Poor little mite! she gives me a pang every time I see her; she has cost me so dearly. I was like Rachel; I said, 'Give me children, or I die,' and my prayer is answered, and death is in the gift."

"It is always so much safer to leave all our wishes in God's hands. He only knows what is best, and surely we may trust His love, as we acknowledge His power and wisdom."

The General shook his head. "I have thought too

little about these things. *She* thought about them though, and she would have led me to a better and higher conception of life. If she had been spared to me, I think I should have listened to her. Fabian, I believe God sent you to me, for you have comforted me as I never hoped to be comforted. You have shown me my own selfishness—my want of faith. Perhaps ere long I shall be able to say—what at her grave *I could not say*—‘The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!’”

“Till we can say that from the heart, there is neither peace nor rest. It is in the nighttime we see the stars; when it is darkest and chilliest we hope for the dawning of a new and better day. And we do not hope in vain. Heaven’s eternal day will surely break, and the sun that never sets rise in all its glory:—

“‘Open our eyes, Thou Sun of life and gladness,  
That we may see that glorious world of Thine!  
It shines for us in vain, while drooping sadness  
Enfolds us here like mists. Come, Power benign,  
Touch our chill’d hearts with vernal smile,  
Our wintry course do Thou beguile;  
Nor by the wayside ruins let us mourn,  
Who have the eternal towers for our appointed bourne.’”

Then for a while they were silent. The flickering fire-light shone cheerily as the shadows deepened without.

The General was thinking of the days that were gone—trying to say from the depths of his aching heart, “My God! Thy will be done.” What Mr. Fabian was thinking let us not inquire. He lay back on his cushions, watching the sad, wistful countenance of the man he called by the sacred name of “friend;” the man who trusted in him so completely; the man whom, at that very moment, he was bent on deceiving and wounding, perhaps unto the death.

Did his spirit relent? did his hard heart quail as he contemplated the part he had pledged himself to play? If so, he made no sign, he said no word; he only—as if in delicate sympathy—refrained from speaking, till the clock on the mantel-piece struck nine, and roused the General from his pensive reverie.

“I really ought to beg your pardon,” he said, as he took



the poker to stir the glowing embers. "I really forgot I was not alone."

"That is just as it should be. I never feel that a man owns me for a true friend, till he keeps silence in my company whenever it pleases him to do so. 'Familiarity breeds contempt,' I am aware; but a fixed and rigid code of what we esteem politeness between close friends is impossible."

"I can't make it out!" cried the General suddenly. "I am not given to friendships—I am, I believe, naturally cold-hearted—and yet here I am taking you as a bosom friend after a few days' intercourse. I don't know but what I am taking what you have never offered!"

"Then I offer it now, if it is worth having! Friendship is like love: it has a mystery of its own, which the deepest philosophy can never fathom. It is possible for two men, and for two women, I suppose, to know more of each other in one hour than they have known of other persons with whom they have been closely associated for years. Mind speaks to mind; whatever may be said to the contrary, there *are* such things as elective affinities. And over some loves and some friendships death itself has no power.

" 'Yet what binds us friend to friend,  
But that soul with soul may blend;  
Soul-like were those days of yore,  
Let us walk in soul once more.' "

"I wonder you have never married!" said the General suddenly. "You are not a man of the world any more than I am, and that, I think, has tended greatly to draw us together; but I should have thought you would have prized highly the sacred sweets of married life—the calm, hallowed happiness which God Himself has bestowed and blessed."

Mr. Fabian sighed. The General thought, as the fire-light played on his face, that his lips quivered. "Spare me, spare me," he said, in a low half-broken tone; "such happiness was not for me. General Seaton, there are partings worse than death; there is an anguish deeper than that which weeps over the cold, senseless form of one that has been passionately beloved. Thank God that your dearest one is with Him!"

"Forgive me, I pray you," said the General, deeply moved. "I did not guess——"

"How could you? Forgive me rather, for being so weak. I have never spoken so freely to any living man. There, let the dead past bury its dead. God's will be done."

The General could not speak, but this terrible and unknown grief was another tie to bind him to the man who had become so mysteriously his friend. Lamps were brought in, the hour of romance was past, and the rest of the evening was spent in discussing the Oxford movement, with which Fabian openly sympathised—the Tracts for the Times, and the *English Church of the future*.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

SEATON OF SOUTHERLEIGH.

"Is she kind as she is fair?  
For beauty lives with kindness;  
Love doth to her eyes repair,  
To help him of his blindness,  
And being helped, inhabits there."

AUBREY lingered in London two days, partly because he was not able at once to deliver the dispatches with which he was charged into the hands of the person for whom they were intended, and Father Fabian's commands on this point had been very stringent; and partly because he liked to feel that for the time, at least, he was his own master, and free to enjoy himself, in his own way, to the best of his ability. He walked about the streets all day, and went gravely to the opera at night; he visited Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's, and wondered how soon the Mass would again be offered on their altars; he went down the river to Greenwich; and finally he obtained a moment's

interview with the great man who with his own hand was to receive the dispatches, and his business in the metropolis was ended.

The shadows of evening were gathering over the leafy woods of Southerleigh, when the young man once more saw the tall white chimneys of his home rising above the trees. Southerleigh was well wooded, and the estate, though small, was liberally kept up, and beautifully situated on the landward slope of the South Downs. And here Aubrey was undoubted heir, not heir presumptive and likely to be put aside, but heir apparent, the only and lawful successor of the present master. And yet, strange to say, the thrill of pleasure which he had experienced at the first sight of Seatondale was not renewed at Southerleigh; he looked without emotion on the ancient building in which he had first drawn breath; he did not even feel pleased to know that for the present, at least, his wanderings were ended. He thought regretfully of the wild North country he had left behind him, and the fair sylvan beauty which lay around seemed tame and poor in comparison with that of Seatondale and Chalfonts, and the surrounding mountain districts. It was little more than a month since he had started on that eventful journey, which had made a man of him; but it might have been a year since last he crossed the flowery glade through which his pathway wound, so changed was he in every respect, so different from the docile, submissive, pious student of St. Omer.

He was received, however, with something like effusion; the servants saw him, and, as he approached the house, the door was thrown open, and the silver-headed butler Vance, and several inferior domestics in the background, were waiting to welcome the young master. They were evidently very glad to see him again.

"Oh! Mr. Aubrey, I am so glad you are come," said old Vance; "we expected you all day yesterday, and when you did not arrive, and there was no letter by this morning's post, the master did get into one of his quandaries; he was sure something had happened!—he has a terrible distrust of these new-fashioned railroads. He almost hoped you might post it down from town."

"I was detained in London; I had business for Father Fabian. How is my father, Vance?"

"Very poorly, Mr. Aubrey, very weak and ailing. I think he has fretted after you. It seems to me"—and the old man lowered his voice—"that there's a great change in him since you went away. The news that came shook him terribly; he was naturally disappointed. He had set his heart on your marrying and settling at Seatondale in good time."

"I must marry and settle at Southerleigh, instead, Vance. Yes, I was disappointed at first,—dreadfully so; it seemed too bad to be kept out of the inheritance that I had been taught to count upon, by a little bit of a baby-girl. But I am getting used to it now, and, after all, I am no worse than I was before—I am still my father's eldest son, and heir of Southerleigh. It was always a mistake treating me as the General's undoubted successor."

"It's a very fine place, Seatondale, sir?"

"The house is not so fine, though it is good enough; but the estate is very large, and ten times richer than Southerleigh. Heigho! one may be very happy with moderate wealth, Vance. Where is my father?"

"He is in the little library, Mr. Aubrey. He dined early, and so did Miss Millicent. They waited dinner for you yesterday, and late dinners don't suit my master; he never sleeps after them. So we've got supper ready for you, Mr. Aubrey, a good substantial hot supper, and you can call it dinner if you like. I will tell the master you have arrived."

"No need to trouble yourself, Vance; he knows," said a sweet voice at the door of Aubrey's room, whither Vance had attended him; and a tall, bright-looking girl, with a pretty, merry face, rushed in, and threw her arms round her brother's neck. "Oh, Aubrey, Aubrey, I am so glad to see you back again that I could kiss you to death! Oh! I have been so dull, and papa has been so—so—well, so tiresome; and your non-arrival yesterday made him ever so much worse. He did nothing but scold me all the afternoon, just as if your delay were any fault of mine! But you are come, and it's all right. Make haste, and throw off that dusty coat, for papa is on the tenter-hooks

of impatience. No, don't stop to titivate ; you may wash your hands, that is all. And when your supper is ready, I will let you know, and you will find me in the dining-room. I hope you are not too tired for a good long talk ?”

Aubrey, having completed a very brief toilet, went to seek his father. He found him in the small, snug book-room, which was generally called the little library. Though the lovely sunset light was glowing on the western horizon, the shutters were closed, the curtains carefully drawn, and the lamp lighted ; and warm as was the evening, a good fire was burning on the hearth. Over the blaze Mr. Seaton was bending ; his knees were covered with a richly-furred rug ; and an Indian silk handkerchief was bound about his head. Nearly three years younger than his brother, the General, he looked at least twelve or fifteen years older ; in fact, he seemed quite an aged man, more like Aubrey's grandfather than his father ; and his voice, when he spoke, was thin and querulous, and might have been taken for the voice of an octogenarian.

“So you are come back ?” he said, reproachfully, half extending a feeble, tremulous hand. “Why did you not come yesterday ? I expected you till quite late at night, and I dined late, and had palpitations, and got no rest till long after daybreak this morning. You made me very ill, Aubrey ; and I might say it is what I should not have expected of you ; you ought to have more consideration for me at my age, and in my state of health.”

“Indeed, sir, I am very sorry ;” and Aubrey hastened to explain. He had hurried to the station the moment his business with the most Reverend Father was completed, and travelled homewards as speedily as possible.

“Father Fabian is always sending people here and there on his business,” grumbled Mr. Seaton. “I am about tired of his interference, Aubrey ; and what's more, I won't have it.”

“He only does his duty, I suppose, sir.”

“It can't be his duty to have his finger in every man's pie ! I am as staunch a Catholic as ever, and the Church has no more obedient son than myself ; but I don't feel inclined to bow my neck to every jack-a-napes of a priest, who uses his authority to meddle in what does not concern

him. And between ourselves, Aubrey, I have not much opinion of the Jesuits. They make quite a science of lying and fraud; and I don't believe they would stick at anything! What's Father Fabian after now?"

"That is more than I can tell you, sir. Though I suppose I should not be far wrong if I said that he had undertaken the conversion of General Seaton and his tenants, and the education of the heiress in the true faith."

"I wish him success with all my heart. I shall not care so much that you are put aside, Aubrey, if Seatondale is once more true to its ancient principles. But how will he manage it? I know my brother William of old; he is a bigoted Protestant, violently prejudiced against our holy religion, and pig-headed in the extreme. Did I understand you aright? Is Fabian actually at Seatondale Hall as your uncle's welcome guest?"

"He is indeed, and likely to remain, till his own house is ready to receive him."

"His own house! You don't mean that he is going to *live* at Seatondale?"

"But I do! There is an old tower, a sort of border-peel, not far from Seaton Hall, and it is being done up for his Reverence, who will take up his abode there as soon as the necessary repairs can be completed."

Mr. Seaton unwound the silk handkerchief from his head, and pushed the rug from his knees into the fender. He seemed to be tremendously excited. "Say that again, lad," he exclaimed, in nervous haste; "say that again, that I may be quite sure of the good news. For if he takes up his residence in Seatondale, he won't want to be here continually prying into my affairs, tampering with my servants, and dictating to my son."

"You seem to be rather hot against Father Fabian, sir. However, I can assure you that for the present he is safely disposed of."

"Hurrah! that's the best report I have heard for ages! Now you and I can do as we like. Aubrey, I am really quite obliged to the squalling little heiress for being born. Pray, in what capacity does your ex-tutor attach himself to my brother's household?"

"In no capacity at all. He is simply General Seaton's

friend, and you know, sir, no man has a greater gift of making fast friends than Father Fabian. The General seems fairly smitten with him."

"It's a puzzle; I should as soon have thought of my brother William attaching himself to Fabian as—as— I can't find a worthy comparison, Aubrey! Why, he raves against what he is pleased to call Popery; he hates it as he hates the devil. And now he is taking to his hearth and arms, you tell me, one of the most devoted, most subtle, most uncompromising, most relentless of the priests of the Church he, with all his heart, abhors. But I dare say he has no notion that Fabian is a *Jesuit*?"

"None in the world. He does not even know that he is a Catholic. He thinks he is a clergyman of the Church of England, of the Anglican way of thinking, which I must say tends Romewards most charmingly. He has no idea that he ever was anything but a member of the self-styled Reformed Church."

"Somebody must have told a precious lot of lies, Aubrey."

Aubrey turned crimson, remembering the letter he had written at Father Fabian's dictation, and his tacit acquiescence in the fraud during the time they had been together at Seaton Hall. He would have spoken freely to his father, but he had promised not to mention the contents of that letter to any one—that letter which he could not think of without burning all over with shame, and a sort of suppressed rage, which was partly directed against himself and partly against the man who had made such a cat's-paw of him. He could only say—"Lies have been told, father, but I do not know to what extent. Untruths were rather implied than uttered in my presence. I think Father Fabian was very glad to get rid of me, for he was continually afraid that I should blab out something prejudicial to his interests. The General is keen enough, though trusting as a child where he perceives no reasons for doubt or suspicion; but should anything occur, ever such a trifle, to open his eyes to the true character of his now honoured guest, let Father Fabian look to himself! I am not sure whether he would not horsewhip him, and let his people duck him in the mere."

"I wish with all my heart he would ! It would do me more good than all the quinine and sarsaparilla in the universe, to see that meddling, tyrannical priest well soused over head and ears. But William won't permit that ; he won't violate the smallest law of hospitality. I know him,—he is a Seaton, though he is a Protestant."

"But Father Fabian is only his guest *pro tempore*. He will be at Malham Tower before the summer is over. Now, those dales-people are very simple and kind-hearted. I like them amazingly ; it is a thousand pities they should be heretics ; but I can just fancy their fury when they find out that they have been deceived and utterly befooled. And they are such stalwart fellows, given to much wrestling and hurling. Father Fabian would be no match for any one of them full roused to indignation."

"Well, I am glad you are out of it, Aubrey. I am thankful you have come home, because as long as you stayed up there in the North you were being compromised. I suppose it won't do to interfere ; but I cannot quite reconcile myself to the idea that fraud is being practised on William, heretic though he be ! But if it results in his conversion, there is a good end gained, which fully justifies the means. What do you say ? ought I to give my brother a word of warning ?"

"Pray don't ask me, sir. Act on your own responsibility. I could not do anything myself—I took that fatal vow of obedience, you know. And there is a great work doing, and to be done, all over England, and we in our ignorance must not mar or hinder it. It will be grand to have all the Seatondales of the true faith once more."

"Certainly it will. Well, I suppose Father Fabian knows what he is about, and acts under orders ; but let you and I have nothing to do with his schemes. Father Eustace succeeds him here, I suppose ?"

"I believe so. He is a dear old man."

"Yes, I have a great esteem for Father Eustace ; a better, kinder, true-hearted man never lived. He won't give us any trouble, Aubrey ; he will just do his duty without bothering anybody. He is not clever, I grant ; he ought to have been a gardener, but he is very good company



when you want a quiet companion. A new rose, or a packet of rare seeds, sends him into ecstasies. Millicent tells me he preached quite a gem of a sermon on Sunday about flowers. He took for his text, 'Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow.' And Millie and he between them decorated the altar entirely with lilies of the valley; the servants say it was a most beautiful sight. Now, I like that sort of thing, though I wish he had a little more appreciation of art. He does not know a good picture from a bad one. He is *artless* in more ways than one. Ha! ha! And that gold and ivory crucifix and the rosary I gave him, he only values them because they have been blessed by his Holiness. However, I won't grumble; one can't have everything, and I would rather have ten Father Eustaces under my roof than a single Father Fabian. But now tell me about the baby; is it going to live?"

"They say so. It is a small child, but perfectly healthy, and it thrives apace. My poor uncle could not bear the sight of it at first, but I think he is beginning to find comfort in the little thing. I took her in my arms the other day, and she opened her eyes and stared at me, as if she knew I was a near relation."

"I say, Aubrey, you might marry her!"

"Marry the baby, sir?"

"Not while she is a baby, of course. But she will grow up, you know. And if this scheme of Father Fabian's succeeds, it will be a good alliance for the Church as well as for the family."

"But I shall be a middle-aged man by the time she is a young woman. There would be too great disparity, sir. Besides, I don't want to wait twenty years for a wife."

"You need not wait twenty years; girls are often married at sixteen."

"That is a long time to look forward to; and I think a man should marry early—that is, moderately early. I am no boy now."

"Certainly not, though Father Fabian has done his best to keep you a boy. And you are right; you ought to marry early. I don't care how soon; I want to see at least one grandchild before I die. It was only a thought

about the Seaton baby—a mere passing thought. It would be an admirable match in many ways, no doubt; but, on the whole, not expedient, and I have something better in prospect for you.”

“Indeed, sir! You make me curious.”

“I have, in fact, chosen a wife for you.”

“You are very good, father; but I should prefer to choose my own wife. You see it is I, and not you, who will have to live with her for no one knows how long—for the next half century, perhaps!”

“Ah! I was wrong to mention it. Youth is naturally perverse. I was perverse myself. If my father had tried to saddle me with a wife I had no inclination for, I should have kicked; I know I should. So I won’t be hard upon you, Aubrey.”

“But who is the lady, sir?”

“Ah, you young dog, I thought I’d make you curious! Young blood is curious as well as hot, isn’t it? But I don’t know that I shall tell you; only I promise you that she is pretty, and very well-born, and of a good old Catholic family, that boasts of never having had a heretic in it. She has not much fortune, I fancy; but that does not matter to us; I shall leave more behind me than people guess, but that is between you and me; and with youth, beauty, and birth—ay, and sweet temper, too—we may very well dispense with money. What do you say, Aubrey?”

“That I care little or nothing about money, sir, so that I have enough to live in comfort and honour, as becomes my father’s son. Have I ever seen the young lady?”

“No, I think not. But I know a great deal about her, and I have seen her twice myself;—once when she was at school at St. Werburgh’s—in your Aunt Agnes’s convent, you know—and once since, only the other day. She is just eighteen; pretty, very pretty, I should say. I should not like you to marry a plain woman, Aubrey; I always disliked plain women. It is a woman’s first duty to be beautiful.”

“You cannot admire beauty more than I do, sir,” replied Aubrey, colouring, and thinking of Edith’s lovely face.

“I think I may promise you never to bring home an ill-

favoured bride, since I am not to be betrothed to Miss Seaton, of Seatondale, who may possibly grow up without much pretension to beauty. Her mother was almost plain, people say, and her father, though handsome as a man, would not be at all charming as a woman. Is the lady you speak of a resident in our neighbourhood?"

"She is not far to seek. You can go courting in the morning, and come back home to sleep, without much fatigue."

"And you will not tell me her name?"

"On second thoughts, no. I was a simpleton to say anything about her. We—that is, her guardian and I—ought just to have thrown you together, and left the rest to nature."

"But it does not follow, sir, that a young man and a girl must fall in love, simply because they are thrown together?"

"It does not follow inevitably, but let them be thrown together often enough, and intimately enough, and in nine cases out of ten it does follow. I fell in love with your mother through being snowed up here for a fortnight, and she fell in love with me, though she was engaged at the time to her cousin, Fabian's father. And he travelled for a week with an Italian beauty, and his fate was settled. If you want to make marriages, make opportunities, and the thing is done. Here is Millie come to call you to supper."

"Do not you come, sir?"

"No, thank you. I take nothing after six o'clock, except my gruel, which Vance always makes for me, because he knows exactly how to do it. There's nothing like a small basinful of gruel, with just a *souppçon* of nutmeg grated into it, and a dessert-spoonful of brandy in it—best Cognac, of course. No, I won't keep him, Millie, and I'll say good-night to both of you. By the time you have finished your supper I shall have taken my gruel, and I never see any one except Vance after that. I hope you have a good supper for him, Millie—good and not heavy? Heavy suppers are a terrible mistake."

"Yes, papa. I ordered roast chickens and asparagus, and there's a meat pie of some sort, and Vance has brought up a bottle of the green seal sherry."

"Ah, well, chicken is light enough, if you just take a slice or two of the wing or breast; but don't touch the asparagus, it is extremely unwholesome at night, especially if you eat it with melted butter, which is absolutely fatal to digestion. Never eat melted butter, or indeed any kind of sauce, if you want to be healthy, and never touch pickles, nor condiments generally, nor sweets, nor pastry, nor pork, nor veal, nor stone fruit, nor carrots, nor cabbage, nor——"

"Oh, papa, do stop!" cried Millicent, impatiently. "Don't you know we must all buy experience for ourselves?"

"And pay for it, Millicent," said her father, gravely; "but if I could persuade everybody to live by rule, and take just half a pint of gruel every night the last thing, I know the world would be all the better for it; and beginning the regimen in youth, people would never know what indigestion is. Now, go in and sup, children, but don't eat much; you know you had a headache last Tuesday week, Millie. And send the pie away; pastry at night is nothing better than rank poison. Just a slice of chicken, plain, without sauce, and a bit of stale bread, and half a glass of sherry tempered with water, won't hurt you. Good-night, children."

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## CHAPTER XV.

## THE MONTH OF MARY.

"My Queen! my Mother! I give thee all myself; and to show my devotion to thee, I consecrate to thee this day my eyes, ears, mouth, heart, myself wholly and without reserve. Wherefore, O loving Mother, as I am thine own, keep me, defend me, as thy property, and thine own possession, Amen."—*The "Garden of the Soul."* Published by Authority, 1873.

IN spite of Mr. Seaton's injunctions, the young people, blissfully ignorant of the woes of dyspepsia, thoroughly enjoyed their supper. When they had finished, Aubrey drew back the curtains and opened one of the windows of the room, letting in a flood of brilliant moonlight, and a stream of sweet perfume from the hawthorn and lilac in the garden. As he leaned forward, a nightingale began to sing, and filled the air with music.

That decided Aubrey; he turned to his sister and said, "Let us go out, Millie; it is not yet ten o'clock—I suppose you are not afraid of the dews? and we may just as well have our chat on the terraces, or in the laurel walk, as in this close shut-up room."

"Delightful!" exclaimed Millicent. "It is just what I should like! I wanted to go out last night, but of course I could not go alone, and my maid is always afraid of, faceache. Wait a moment, I may as well be prudent; I will fetch a scarf or something from the cloak closet."

"Suppose we get locked out? They will be shutting up the house directly, and it will not do to make any disturbance, because of our father."

"I have the key of the chapel here; it opens the little postern door—we can get into the house that way, quite easily."

"Of course we can; let us go then. What a delicious night! warm enough for midsummer."

"Now, Aubrey, tell me everything."

"All about Seatondale, do you mean?"

"Yes; I want to know what sort of man the General is,

and how he and Father Fabian get on together, and if it is a nice little baby, and if its papa is very fond of it. Tell me everything."

And Aubrey to the best of his ability told Millicent all she wished to know.

"It is too bad though," she said, when he had finished, "that you should lose the estates, after all these years. But I suppose nobody is to blame."

"Certainly not. My uncle has as much right to a direct heir as my father has. And after all, I don't so much care about it, for I shall not be a poor man in any case; it was rather greedy to want both Seatondale and Southerleigh, I think. Only the baby has the best of the bargain; her inheritance is a far finer one than mine, and the General is awfully rich, and growing richer whether he will or not. There is hematite ore on his land, and lead-mines besides, and he got a potful of money in the old war time when he was fighting Boney."

"He might leave you some of it. What does a girl want with such heaps of money? A very rich heiress is so likely to become the prey of fortune-hunters. I think he ought to leave you, or better still, give you at once a few thousand, just by way of making up for the disappointment."

"He will not leave me a shilling. And he would say, I had no reason to be disappointed; I ought always to have considered the possibility of children being born to him. Besides, Millie, a great deal of his money is not entailed, and he would never in any case have left it to me—'the Popish heir,' as I heard myself called over and over again, before people knew who I was. There were fine rejoicings over the baby, chiefly because she would keep me from the succession. I believe those simple folks fancied I was a regular dragon, all the Jesuits rolled into one, and armed with the thunderbolts of the Vatican, and the powers of the Spanish Inquisition. I am not sure they didn't expect an *auto da fé* every five years or so, on the heath at Seatondale."

"How bigoted people are! Why, you would have been the best of landlords, Aubrey; and are they *all* heretics?"

"Every one of them, Millie. There is only one good Catholic there, and that is Uncle Fabian, as I am henceforth to call him."

"Don't call him 'a good Catholic,' Aubrey—a zealous Catholic he may be, but *good* he is not. There! I don't mind saying so to you; I hate Father Fabian; I hate him, but not so much as I dread him."

"Why do you dread him?"

"Because he has no more conscience than a brute beast. Because he has no *heart*, no pity! He makes a Moloch of his religion; he would sacrifice human lives to it, if he dared. Don't tell me—I know he would, Aubrey; he would be just another Torquemada if he had the power, which, thank God, he hasn't."

"He thinks it is his duty to bring heretics into the true fold, at any price."

"But it is all nonsense; people can't be forced into convictions. If I were put to the torture this hour, for my religion, I might perhaps declare myself a Protestant, but I should not be one really; I should hate Protestantism a thousand times more than I did before. Like Galileo, who got up from his knees after his forced recantation and muttered, 'It moves, notwithstanding,' I should say in my heart the moment I was taken from the rack, 'Cursed be Protestantism.' No, Aubrey, if people don't believe intelligently and of their own free will, they don't believe at all; and that God can be pleased with a false or empty profession of faith is a supposition far worse than absurd. I would not credit it, though his Holiness and all the Sacred College swore it. Indeed, there are a great many things I don't credit."

"Millicent, take care what you are about; you are on perilous ground. If you once begin to doubt, where may you not end?"

"I shall end with God, I hope. Aubrey, there is no true belief without doubts, I am sure; for it is not a true belief which never inquires into anything. What did God give me my reason for, if I am never to use it? Why did He create me an intelligent creature, if I am simply to sit down, and accept just what is taught me and no more—taught me, too, by mortal men, who may err and

tell me what is not truth. It is of no use, Aubrey, I cannot do it."

"Some one has been tampering with you, Millie. Who has been tempting you to scepticism?"

"No one; I have not spoken to any Protestant. I have not read one page of controversy, and I have listened to none."

"It is the devil, then."

"Nay, I hope not; I think it is God."

"How long have you thought thus, Millie?"

"For nearly a year; but it is only within the last few weeks that I have thought seriously about it—very seriously, I mean. You don't know that Father Fabian wanted me to be a nun?"

"No, indeed! He did, did he? I should have thought three nuns in one family—four, if you count Aunt Agnes—might have satisfied even his pious zeal."

"Aubrey, tell me truly. Do you love Father Fabian as you once did?"

"No, I do not. His tortuous polity annoys me; it hurts my sense of honour; it offends the manliness of my nature. And the authority he would fain exercise frets and galls me. I feel that I am no longer a boy, and I claim a man's freedom of action. I do not see why I, arrived at man's estate, should acknowledge the authority of any person, except that of my father, to whom I would willingly concede much, for I believe in filial obligations. But, Millie, you did not listen to him?"

"Not for a moment! I told him plainly that I had no vocation; I declared that I neither would nor could become a nun; and finally, I said to him that I did not believe in shutting up men and women in convents and monasteries, that our work was in the world, and that we best served God by doing our duty among our fellow-creatures."

"Was he very angry?"

"Horribly! He did not say much, but he turned pale to the lips—as you know he does when he is in a passion! He sent for me to confession the day before he left us, and he gave me a very severe penance—nothing less than watching in the chapel all night, repeating I don't know



how many prayers, *Paternosters*, and *Ave Marias* ! But I did not do it, and I don't mean to."

"Upon my word, Millie, you are more than half a heretic."

"Am I ? Well, I cannot help it. There is so much in our religion that seems so foolish, so childish, when you come to look fairly into it ; so foolish, that I do wonder whether the priests believe in it themselves ! Why, it appears to me that we come very near to being *idolaters*."

"In what way ?"

"In paying so much reverence to saints generally ; in worshipping, as we do, the Virgin Mary especially. I know we women are taught to make much more of her than of Jesus Christ. I have been considering the matter very closely for the last few weeks, for this, you know, is the '*Month of Mary*.'"

"Yes, of course it is ; the pleasantest and sweetest month in all the year is dedicated to the Queen of Heaven. I went into a great church in London, and the altar was one blaze of light and one glow of the most beautiful flowers. And a choir—the sweetest and fullest I ever heard—was singing the loveliest hymn, in English, too. I copied the first three verses. Listen—

" ' Hail, thou star of ocean,  
Portal of the sky !  
Ever Virgin mother  
Of the Lord most high.

" ' Oh ! by Gabriel's Ave,  
Uttered long ago,  
Eva's name reversing,  
'Stablish peace below.

" ' Break the captive's fetters ;  
Light on darkness pour ;  
All our ills expelling,  
Every bliss implore.' "

"Very poetical, I grant, but what is the sense of making Gabriel talk Latin ? And if he did say '*Ave*,' Mary, who was only a poor peasant girl, would not have understood him. I don't know what language the Jews spoke then familiarly among themselves, but, whatever it was, it was not Latin, certainly ; I should say it was Hebrew. So all

that about reversing Eva's name is pretty nonsense. Then the hymn says, 'Break the captive's fetters.' Now, Aubrey, the Bible says it is God Himself who sets free the captives, and gives light to those who are in darkness. I can't find one word from beginning to end—and I've read every word of the New Testament twice over—I can't find the shadow of a word about making a goddess of the blessed Virgin."

"*The Bible*, Millie! Have you permission to read it? We have always been told that it is a very dangerous book if read by the unlearned."

"That is just one of the things I cannot make myself perceive, and the more I read it, the more certain I feel that our directors keep it from us for their own purposes. There is not a word about Mary in the New Testament to lead any one to pay her the honour which we are charged to do by our Church. In fact, Aubrey, it seems to me that she is made to be above God Himself."

"Nay, nay, Millie, you go quite too far! We only invoke Mary as the friend of sinners, as the gracious mother, the intercessor who presents our prayers."

"She is made of greater account than Jesus Christ. She is represented as more merciful and more powerful. Only a day or two ago I read in a little book which we all have, '*The Month of Mary*,' and which is abridged, you know, from the '*Glories of Mary*,' a very curious, and, I thought, a very shocking story. It was put in the form of a vision, a vision of the judgment-day. There were two ladders descending from heaven, one red and the other white. At the top of the red ladder sat Jesus Christ, and near to Him, says the book, '*the Seraphic Father*,'—that is to say, I imagine, the great God, the Creator Himself; and He invited His friars to mount the ladder, animating them with sweet and encouraging words. They obeyed, but could not succeed. One after another they fell from the ladder, some at the second or third, some at the fourth, some at the tenth round. Then St. Francis exhorted them to try the *white* ladder of Mary. And as they did so our lady kindly reached out her hand, and they easily ascended to heaven. The tale ends with this sentence:—'Poor creatures that we should be if we had not this most

powerful mother, who helps in the most important matters him that is mounting to heaven only by the ladder of justice. Now, the story shows Mary as doing for the sinner what neither the Father nor the Son would do; as being at least infinitely more merciful than they, if not more powerful. What do you say, Aubrey?"

"Oh! it is only a story, meant for the common people, who need this sort of pabulum for their spiritual sustenance. It is not required of you to accept it as veritable fact. You must take it as a kind of parable."

"Yes, but a parable has a meaning, and generally a very deep meaning too. Our Lord's parables had, undoubtedly. Nor can it be in accordance with God's will that any Church should teach what is mere fable, even to the most ignorant of her children. But that story is only one among many equally blasphemous, and if possible, more absurd. You must have seen the book, Aubrey!"

"Oh yes, I have it somewhere, but I never took much notice of it, and now I have forgotten all about it. 'The Month of Mary' is chiefly written for women, I suppose, for Mary seems naturally the patroness of her own sex."

"I don't see what we want with Jesus Christ at all if Mary has the power which our Church attributes to her. Either Christ or Mary is clearly superfluous, though by all accounts Mary can be sufficiently merciless and vindictive upon occasion."

"*Mary vindictive!* How will you prove that, Millicent?"

"Nay, I only go by the teaching of the Church. I am told that once upon a time two youths went out on a river for pleasure, and when they were in the boat one said to the other, 'Now we have nothing to do, and have amused ourselves enough, let us recite our Lady's office, as the rule of our congregation requires.' But his companion objected, urging that there was no obligation, and that he intended to devote the day to amusement, whereupon he recited it alone. By-and-by the wind got up, and the current grew too strong for the young boatmen, who were little accustomed to steering or rowing, and presently, as might have been expected, the boat turned over and sank, and they both called upon Mary to save them. Mary at once

appeared, took the hand of the youth who had recited her office, and drew him out of danger. The other anticipated the like charity, but our Lady returned and said to him, '*You were not obliged to honour me, nor am I to help you;*' with which amiable speech she left him to the mercy of the waves. Now, that story shows Mary in a very sorry light; and nearly all the legends, I think, prove her to be exceedingly vainglorious and greedily fond of homage. So long as people recite her office, or otherwise acknowledge her claims, she will help them; but she turns a deaf ear to those who have not rendered her the worship she requires."

"And is not that right? Must not the sinner reap the consequences of his own fatal neglect?"

"That was not how Christ treated the thief upon the cross. He only says, 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy-laden;' He never stipulates for so many prayers and acts of homage as His mother does, according to the universal teaching of the Church. Then I read of a certain rich nobleman, who, having lived a profligate and irreligious life, was seized with contrition upon his death-bed—if, indeed, that can be called contrition which was only the terror of hell. Having confessed several times, and taken the *Viaticum*, he expired, and our Lord at once appeared to St. Bridget, who appears to have taken a great deal of interest in the case, and told her, to her infinite astonishment, that the converted soul was in purgatory, and shortly expected to arrive in Paradise. When the saint, who was evidently somewhat scandalised at the news, expressed her surprise, our Lord condescended to explain how it was that a man who had lived so wickedly should merit the great grace of dying contrite. Said He, 'Know then, daughter, that My mother has locked the gates of hell for him, for although he did not ever love her heartily, still his habit was frequently to call to mind her dolours, and to feel compassion for her as often as he heard her mentioned, and to think about her; and so he is saved!' Now, Aubrey, what do you think of that?"

"Rubbish! bosh! I wish such things were not printed. It's my private belief, Millie, that such writings do Catholicism an immense deal of mischief. For how can

one ask people with common-sense—putting education out of the question—to believe such utter trash ? ”

“ And yet thousands do believe it. And as to private belief, Aubrey, I suppose neither you nor I have any business to hold it ; and if I am half a heretic, I do not see that you are much better. What has made you so different from what you were when you went into the North ? ”

“ Am I different ? Yes, I suppose I am ; I feel that I am. I cannot tell you how the change came about, for I cannot understand it myself. The first thing that struck me was the firm belief that Protestants have in their own doctrines, as opposed to ours. And they seemed such *good* people, too—some of them, at least—that I felt myself rebelling against the decrees which consign them to eternal misery because they are not Catholics. Mind, Millie, I still think that the Catholic religion is the best and the only true religion ; but I no longer believe in its perfection, in its entire infallibility ; and I cannot bring myself to acquiesce in the system of fraud and deceit, which is not only permitted but enjoined when certain issues are to be obtained. *That*, more than anything else, shakes my faith in much which I have been taught, and which I have implicitly believed, ever since I can remember. It may be for the glory of certain authorities, but it never can be for the glory of God, that Catholics should perpetrate deceit, and treachery, and, Judas-like, betray those with whom they sit at meat. The long and the short of it is, Millie, that I seem to myself like two distinct persons—one devoutly holding all the articles of our most holy faith, and the other protesting involuntarily against some of the dogmas and principles of that faith. I little thought that I should speak so freely to you ; I had no idea that you, too, were the subject of these painful doubts. And even now, at this very moment, I feel dreadfully afraid of encouraging you in what may turn out to be downright heresy. Again I say, *beware* !—though, after all I have admitted, it seems the height of inconsistency for me to say it.”

“ I think I understand you perfectly. I have much the same feeling myself. If I dare run risks for myself, I

would not for worlds tempt you to share the hazard. But I have prayed, and do pray, that God Himself may teach me by His Spirit what He has promised to all who ask it. So far, I have had no human teacher, and I think I will have none, till I am more settled in my mind ; though a thousand little things in books, in people, in newspapers, in public events—things not bearing at all directly on religious questions—have opened my eyes, and shown me much which I never saw, or even guessed at, hitherto. Hush ! Aubrey ; there is some one among the laurels !”

“Nonsense. Only some horrid cat on the prowl. I was just going to observe—and in the strictest confidence, remember——”

“It is no cat, Aubrey ; there is somebody close at hand, listening to every word we say. Run round the bank, while I stay here.”

Aubrey obeyed, thinking it best to humour his sister, whose fears, however, he did not share. He intended to plunge straight into the thicket, and he quite expected to see flying at his approach, a scared cat or two, or something else on four legs, and with a tail. Perhaps a rabbit ; or was it not a hedgehog ? there were several about he knew, and they could make a considerable disturbance when moving rapidly. He jumped quickly on to the bank, and came behind the laurels in front of which he and Millie had been strolling and sometimes standing still. Millie was right ; some one had been listening, for a human figure was hastily flitting along the mossy walk and making for the house. “Hallo !” he cried loudly, and gave immediate pursuit ; but the path was shady and winding, and he soon lost sight of the intruder, whom he sought for in vain all round the building. When he returned to Millicent she was on the terrace. She seemed terribly agitated.

“Don’t be frightened, dear,” he said, soothingly. “I dare say it was one of the maids, keeping an appointment with her young man. We have spoiled her little game, that is all—and serve her right, she ought not to be out here courting at this time of night.”

“I wish you may be right,” replied Millicent, in a whisper. “I believe it was somebody who stole out on

purpose to hear what we were saying, and perhaps to report it to Father Fabian. Depend upon it, he has left his spies behind him; by hook or by crook, he will yet hold Southerleigh, while he strives for Seatondale. Aubrey, I would not have been overheard for all the world!"

"Never mind, dear; we must make the best of it. We will not be overheard again. It is awkward, certainly, if what you fear is correct—and it may be! it would be just like Father Fabian to set his spies on the household. But who is the spy?"

"I have no idea; one of the servants probably. I do not trust my own maid very much, and she is quite a devotee. However, as you say, we must make the best of it. But if I were not a British subject on British soil, it might go ill with me; after the confession I have made to-night I should be safe in some convent before this day week, if I were in France or Italy, and God knows whether I should ever come out again! It is a glorious thing to be English, is it not?"

"I begin to think it is. And yet England is the stronghold and fortress of Protestantism, and the countries where tyranny can be exercised are essentially Catholic!"

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE FEAST OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW.

"And in that ancient hall they sat,  
And held the feast and poured the wine."

THE summer passed away quietly and uneventfully at Seatondale. Nothing happened which could greatly astonish anybody, and yet as the peaceful days and weeks rolled on, changes were imperceptibly transpiring. Malham Tower underwent a tolerably thorough rehabilitation; huge wooden cases came down from London, oak-carvings were fitted to the library, the famous cooking-range ap-

peared, to the great admiration of the servants at the Hall, and ere the days began to shorten, Mr. Fabian had finally removed to his new residence, in which he soon seemed as comfortably settled as if he had lived there half his lifetime. His health was greatly improved, and he was able to take occasional "duty" for Mr. Clifford, who was not at all sorry to enjoy a little more leisure than usual.

Mr. Fabian preached first in Seatondale Chapel on Trinity Sunday, which fell that year early in June, and though not more than half a dozen of his auditors could possibly have any conception of the true meaning of his sermon, it was voted on all hands to be "a very learned and most beautiful discourse."

"It were fine now," said Mrs. Fluke, as she walked home to her usual Dominical dinner of fat bacon and batter-pudding. "I liked what he said about t' Church, mightily; only he called it t' Catholic Church, and it ain't Catholic, you know, but Protestant,—for I'm sure he meant our very ain Church; and wasn't it grand what he said about our beloved and ancient Mother, the Church of England?"

"It was the grandest piece of oratory I ever heard, Mistress Fluke," replied old Jonas, who, according to custom, since the death of his "old woman," was returning to the "Golden Lion" to take his Sunday dinner with the landlady and Miss Dinah. "But ye need no' be in a fix about the Catholic Church. Surely the Church of England is the true Catholic Church, and the only one, and that was what Mr. Fabian did mean. Doan't we say in t' Creed two times over, 'I believe in t' Holy Catholic Church'?"

"Why, yes, to be sure we do," put in Miss Dinah, "though, really I never thought on't afore; I just said the words after you and passon, Mr. Jonas, without thinking much about what they meant. But there's the church at St. Ulpha's where the Virgin and the Child is over the door, that's called the Catholic Church. Now it do puzzle one to be right sure which is which, don't it?"

"Not at all, Miss Dinah, if you only understand, which t' laity, and women-folk especially can't be expected to. That place at St. Ulpha's, where they worships the Virgin



Mary and lots o' saints an' saintesses, and bows down at the tinkling of a little bell to a bit of wafer made of flour and water, that's the *Roman Catholic Church*, or, as t' General always ca's it, t' Church o' t' Papisists. We're the genuine Catholics, Miss Dinah and Mrs. Fluke; and *our Church* is the true Church, and if we doan't believe what it believes, without doubt, as Prayer-book says, we shall perish everlastingly."

"But ours isn't a church," replied Mrs. Fluke, more puzzled than ever: "it's a *chapel*, and we do live in a chapelry, ye know."

"Ay, ay! it's a' one. I was na spaking o' t' buildings, but o' t' whole Church militant, which takes in a' the Church of England, whether it meets in cathedrals or in chapels like our ain. But did not Mr. Fabian give the Methodies a gude dressing? I always knewed they and the other sorts—Baptises and such like, and Quakers—were—I can't mind the word at this moment, Miss Dinah, but it is summat like *skism-attics*! Sort o' heretics, ye know. And how a man, or a woman, either, can demean theirselves to be Methodies, or Baptises, or Quakers, when they can be respectable Church folk, I can't imagine. Thank God, I always kep' my Church, which has kep' me in a state o' salvation, and I pray unto God to give me His grace that I may continue in t' same unto my life's end! Laws! Mister Fabian didn't leave them Methodies a leg to stand on! He clean debolished 'em. Now, Mr. Clifford never did smash t' Dissenters properly."

"Do you think it's good," asked Miss Dinah, "for Christian folk to go smashing of each other up? Don't it seem rather uncharitable? and mayn't the Methodies, who are very worthy bodies in their way, find their religion suit 'em better thap ours? People has all sorts o' tastes and opinions, ye know, Jonas."

"People has no business wi' tastes an' opinions in matters o' religion. There's t' Church to teach 'em what's reet an' proper, an' a' they have to do is to listen to t' voice of t' passon an' t' voice of t' clerk, be he parish clerk or chapel clerk—an' keep their church reglar, and pay their Easter dues, like Christians."

With which exordium they reached the "Golden Lion,"

and dined happily without troubling themselves any further as to the merits of rival creeds. Only from time to time Mrs. Fluke laid down her knife and fork to exclaim, "That was a sermon; now I never felt sleepy, not once." And when dinner was nearly concluded, and Miss Dinah had filled up Jonas's pint mug with good brown ale, he wiped his mouth, and remarked that he would give them "a Sunday toast" — and it was, "Confusion to t' Methodies!"

Now you must not suppose that above all sects the Methodists were hated and contemned by the staunch Episcopalians of Seatondale. They were more frequently mentioned simply because they were best known. To their credit be it spoken, the Methodists were the first to carry Gospel light into the dark places of the Lake district, where, till within the last twelve or twenty years, the piety of the Established Church was at the very lowest ebb. The Seatondalers, and still more the Chalfonts folks, knew Dissent only as represented by Methodism—generally speaking, Primitive Methodism; that is, they knew no other *ism* by personal experience. They had heard of Baptists, *alias* "Baptises," and they believed that these dipped grown people in ponds and rivers, and more often than not drowned them! As to Independents, as they were then called, it was not known what they professed, or what kind of worship they affected, though within the last two years an Independent chapel had been opened at St. Ulpha's—a sort of Union chapel in which the Baptists and Independents amicably combined, and in the services of which there was a very prevalent flavour of Methodism.

Thirty years ago religion was altogether at the lowest ebb in the north-western counties. Dissent was very poorly represented, and the Established Church did as little, and that little as drowsily and in as slovenly a fashion as she possibly could. The clergy were, for the most part, sadly immoral and careless in their lives; only here and there, as in the case of the good Carus-Wilson of Casterton, a light shone through the dense darkness, and a minister of Christ comprehended his awful responsibilities. I have myself known a whole district, comprising several large parishes, wherein a clergyman could

not be found sufficiently sober to baptize a dying infant with decency; and I could scarcely point out half a dozen churches in the whole North country in which the service was performed with anything like earnestness or reverence. Carus-Wilson, on the fair Luneside, did his best in his own way, and our noble Dr. Arnold, between Rydal and Ambleside, did his best in another fashion, and no doubt these two, and others now entered into their rest, did much towards leavening the mass of ignorance, immorality, and heathenism which then disgraced the fairest region in the land.

But a happy change has passed over those long benighted counties. The churches generally have awakened from their slumbers. Episcopalians and Dissenters alike work vigorously in their various fields of labour, and the clear light shines in many remote corners where once gross darkness and superstition prevailed. During the last few years the tide of improvement has rolled in like a flood; and among other small reforms, *clerks*, such as poor old Jonas, whom I used to know very well, have passed out of existence.

After Mr. Fabian's first sermon it frequently happened that he took some part in the service, and his beautiful mellow tones contrasted rather too vividly with Mr. Clifford's slovenly style of conducting public worship, so much so that the curate felt uneasy, and once or twice told his wife in private that though it was a great help to have an idle clergyman always at hand to take "duty" when required, he would, on the whole, have been better pleased had Mr. Fabian never come to Seatondale. Mrs. Clifford had felt something of the same kind. A vague uneasiness filled her mind from time to time—a sort of shadowy fear that their new friend might interfere with her husband a little more than was desirable. That he should receive an impetus in the right direction was well enough, for being emphatically the curate's *better* half, his want of energy, and his way of letting things go to save trouble oftentimes grieved her sorely. And she did her best to supplement his shortcomings; but that best, burdened as she was with many young children and insufficient means, could not do much, and when it came to public ministra-

tions failed entirely. She hardly knew whether to be glad or to be sorry that Mr. Fabian had settled at Malham Tower, and she tried to think that she was chiefly glad, for it was good for Edward to have a clerical friend who was both a gentleman and a scholar, and one who seemed so deeply impressed with the responsibilities of his ordination vows. Nevertheless, there were misgivings, and she caught herself saying more than once, "I do hope this man will not turn out a trouble!"

But a trouble he was bound to be to so dilatory and ease-loving a cleric as the curate of Seatondale. Mr. Clifford stuck to—"As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be," in things both small and great. He was eminently Conservative and hated change, and it soon appeared that Mr. Fabian delighted in alterations, and his Conservatism, if he had any, was far other than the Conservatism of his friend. The worst of it was that General Seaton was evidently inclined to support him in all that he proposed, and if the General went ahead all the dales-people would, sooner or later, follow suit.

"My dear," said Mr. Clifford, one day in August, to his wife, "something has happened, and I don't quite know what to do."

"What is it?" she asked, quietly, not pausing in her work of darning a very old sock.

"It is about the services. We have all but agreed to have service on saints' days."

"It won't answer," said Mrs. Clifford, still diligently plying her long needle. "The people will not come; and, indeed, there are not many who can come."

"Precisely what I said at the Hall; but Fabian replied in that way he has, you know, the way that carries all before him—'Do you think it is a question of answering or not answering? It must answer if it is right; and as there are services provided by our Church for certain days, it seems such a pity not to take advantage of them.'"

"What did the General say?"

"He agreed with Fabian. He thinks sufficient attention is not paid by Churchmen to the Rubric. We shall be having daily services next."

"The saints' days don't come very often, dear, and you may as well be reading the morning prayers as doing anything else, you know."

"Oh, as for that, Fabian takes all the onus on himself, and he proposes to defray all the extra expenses if there should be any. Of course, I can refuse permission, and so squash the whole thing, for it is a matter which cannot be referred to Dr. Redmayne; but it would not look well, would it?"

"No; neither will it look well, I am afraid, for Mr. Fabian to take the whole responsibility. People will begin to extol his zeal, and to speak of you as lukewarm; I don't myself see the good of keeping saints' days, particularly in a place like this; but still there can be no harm in it, and if I were you, my dear, I would not, for more reasons than I can name, leave the entire week-day duty to Mr. Fabian."

"Well, perhaps you are right. Of course there will be no sermon, and one may get through the prayers in an hour or less, especially on non-litany days. It does not so much matter, only the proposal being his gives him a sort of pre-eminence; and another thing—I don't know why, but it struck me very forcibly that this innovation was only the beginning of attempted reforms, the thin side of the wedge, inserted, you know."

"Well, if the changes are for good, we must not grumble. I know dear Mrs. Seaton often wished for a more earnest spirit in matters of religion, and she very much disapproved of the practice of taking the Sacrament only on Christmas Day and Easter Sunday."

"She always took it four times a year."

"Yes, as frequently as she had the opportunity. I have often thought, dear, we might have the Sacrament administered *monthly*."

"Pray do not mention your thought to the General or to Fabian, or that will be the next movement. I can't see why we should not go on as we have done; we have managed very well. I am always suspicious of novelties, and there is this new Oxford school putting forward its queer notions and its Popish doctrines, and Fabian openly declares himself in favour of what he calls *Anglicanism*,

and says that the Reformation was in many ways a terrible mistake."

And once more the curate made a mild protest, but it ended in Mr. Fabian carrying out very speedily his project. On the 24th of August, St. Bartholomew's-day, exactly at ten o'clock in the morning, the cracked bell began its loud clanging, to the consternation of all the people who were not in the secret of the holiday service, and a whole band of reapers came over full speed from Garth Head, bucket in hand, to assist in putting out the fire which they, deluded by the imaginary tocsin, supposed to be raging in Seatondale. Finding no flames to extinguish, they all took a drop at the "Golden Lion," and then by unanimous consent adjourned to the chapel, "just to speir whatten jinks them passons was up to," as the spokesman of the party remarked to Mrs. Fluke; Miss Dinah and her prayer-book being already on the way to church. The reapers arrived late, and clattered in very noisily just as Mr. Fabian, in his snowy new surplice, was reciting, or rather intoning, the first verse of the 116th Psalm, which, as all good Episcopalians know, is appointed for the twenty-fourth morning of the month.

Mrs. Clifford and her two eldest children were present, also the General and a good sprinkling of the Hall servants, also Mr. Fabian's housekeeper and valet from the Tower, and several other people, besides Miss Dinah, who were attracted by the novelty of the proceeding. But Jonas was not in his place. After he had duly rung the bell, he departed to his own cottage, took up his position in the porch, and there—not at all like Patience on a monument—poured out the story of his wrongs to every passer-by. Mr. Fabian had politely informed him that his services in the clerk's desk would not that morning be required, and Jonas considered himself deeply injured and insulted. He would have been considerably aggravated had he known how very well they managed without him. Altogether, the difficulties of the position being taken into account, Mr. Fabian's pious venture was a success.

The General and he went home together to Malham Tower; Mr. Fabian had invited his friend to lunch with him. It was the General's first visit since the restoration

of the building. "Are you a sorcerer?" asked the old soldier in undisguised astonishment, as he gazed around him. The dilapidated ruinous *peel* had become a small mediæval castle; the dining-room or "*refectory*," into which Mr. Fabian ushered his guest, was arranged in far better taste than any apartment at the Hall, and the table was well supplied and excellently served. It was quite a choice repast to which the two gentlemen sat down. There were trout from the mere near at hand, caught an hour before they went into the pan; there was a brace of grouse, most exquisitely cooked French fashion; mutton cutlets and tomato sauce, and a fine guinea fowl roasted to a turn. There were some trifles, too, in the way of sweets, creams such as the General had never tasted in Seatondale; foreign jellies, and the very choicest wines.

The dessert was poor enough, for the kitchen garden of Malham Tower yielded only a few half-wild gooseberries and apples of the sourest. Mr. Fabian apologised: "You see," he said, "I have had no time to turn myself yet; I have given all my time and attention to the Tower itself, and I think I have made it fairly habitable."

"I cannot conceive how you have effected so much in so short a space of time, and I cannot believe this is the deserted ruin I walked over only three months ago, feeling sure that it could never be made into anything like a comfortable, decent abode. How have you managed it? You have not been very much on the spot."

"No, I am not fond of personal superintendence. I drew my plans; I gave my orders; I wrote ample instructions to a man in town, who has done this sort of thing for several friends of mine, and who knows my mediæval tastes, and you see the result. I told him to turn in his best workmen and plenty of them, the rough work I thought the lads about here might manage, and he obeyed me to the letter; of course I gave him *carte-blanche* as to expense."

"You must be a fine rich fellow," said the General to himself. "You must have spent a pretty penny, and you'll have to spend a lot more if you finish as you have begun." Meanwhile he sipped his wine with the appreciation of a connoisseur.

"Where do you get this stuff?" he asked, as he refilled his glass. "I have a little of it, but so little that I am very chary of it; and I want some more."

"I imported this myself; I generally do import my own wines. I have plenty of it in town, and several other sorts, that I hope you will approve. I've some Burgundy, and some *Rose* claret that cannot be got now for any money, the vintage is all bought up. My cellar here is not quite the thing just yet, and it is too cold; I must adopt some means of raising the temperature. Ah, by the way, I took the liberty of sending my fellow to the Hall to beg a pail or two of ice. I thought you would not like your wine without it, and, of course, I have none here. I'll have an ice-well dug before the winter sets in; and in a year or two I hope I shall have some fruit worthy of your consideration. The soil lower down the slope is excellent; and I must have plenty of glass, as the winters are so severe. There is the plan of two forcing-houses: the small one is for grapes only, the larger one for peaches, apricots, and nectarines. A pinery must come later; one cannot do everything at once."

The General was so astonished he could not reply. He was still more surprised when, the repast being over, his host took him over the Tower and the outbuildings, and showed him the alterations already completed, and explained the projected improvements.

From the kitchens to the topmost story everything was in perfect order; the stable and out-offices were still under repair, and the gardens were very much as they had been for the last half century. Mr. Fabian's cow had arrived,—a beautiful, sleek Alderney; a choice breed of fowls strutted and pecked about in their enclosure, and two fine young porkers were already grunting in the sty. In spite of what had been betrayed in that hour of after-dinner confidence three months ago, the General made up his mind that Mr. Fabian must be going ere long to bring home a wife.

"Where did your servants come from?" he could not help asking, when during the afternoon they were served with exquisite Mocha in cups of priceless china. "My old butler will have to take a lesson from your foreign-looking



fellow; as for my cook, she is not fit to hold a candle to yours."

"My valet, who is footman, butler, and confidential servant all in one, I have had for the last ten years. I had the good fortune to save his life in a skirmish with banditti. I picked him up in Rome, and he has been half over the world with me since, and is as faithful, as attentive and capable. There is nothing he cannot turn his hand to: he speaks half a dozen languages, and has excellent taste. My housekeeper is my cook; she, too, is an old family servant. She is as good as any *chef*; and I would trust her *cuisine* under any circumstances."

"I should think you might, indeed! Only, Fabian, you can't exactly figure as the monk of Malham Tower, if you live in so much luxury. I had an idea you were going to turn out an ascetic on our hands, and play the hermit in this solitary place, along with owls and coot and other small deer."

Mr. Fabian laughed. "I never intended to convey any such impression; nevertheless, my own habits are extremely simple. I keep a frugal table when alone: it suits my health for one thing. But I have always been accustomed to a certain style of living, and, as I hope to see my friends about me—I have a large clerical, literary, and diplomatic circle—it behoves me to keep up a thoroughly appointed and efficient establishment. And I am so much in love with the place. I feel a real pleasure in making the very best of it. I could not have found a residence more entirely to my mind."

"It is well you have it on so long a lease, or I might turn you out for pure spite and envy. Well, I must be going: I think we have satisfactorily kept holiday, and celebrated with all due honours the Feast of St. Bartholomew."

## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE CHURCH CHOIR.

"Alas! alas! those ruined aisles,  
Where never now the anthem swells!  
Alas! alas! that roofless choir,  
'Those ancient towers, those silent bells!'"

"Do you not think we might improve our service of song?" asked Mr. Fabian, on All Saints' Day, of Mr. Clifford, when they were dining with the General at the Hall.

Now Mr. Clifford, who had rather a taste for music, had often wished that it could be improved, if only the necessary alterations could be effected without trouble to himself. The term, "Service of Song," which has of late years been so widely employed, he had never heard before; but he, of course, understood that it applied to the singing in that very primitive place of worship called Seatondale Chapel. Had the proposition come from any other source he would have been, at least, well pleased to consider it; coming as it did from that meddler, Mr. Fabian, he felt very much inclined to turn crusty on the spot, and refuse his sanction to so much as a hair's breadth reform in the singing gallery.

"Service of song!" cried the General, before he could frame an expedient answer; "service of screech-owls you might call it, and not be far wrong. I thought last Sunday the time had come to be doing something a little better; I wonder we never set about it before, only this is such a Sleepy-Hollow part of the world, and we were all such Rip Van Winkles till Providence kindly sent Mr. Fabian to wake us up. Hasn't it struck you, Mr. Clifford, that we are a good deal behind our neighbours in this respect? And they are nothing to boast of! If we even sang heartily, as the Methodists do—confound them!—I should not mind so much, and they do manage somehow to keep tolerably in tune, while we only succeed in droning

out a series of miserable shrill discords, in which, perhaps, a dozen people join. And then we read the Psalms instead of chanting them."

"Chant the Psalms, my dear General!" interposed Mr. Clifford. "One might as well try to get up one of Handel's oratorios as attempt anything in the way of *chanting*. They—I mean our choristers, if I dare call them so—have no ideas beyond Devizes, Calcutta, Shirland, Lydia, Sicilian Mariners, and perhaps half a dozen more plain hymn tunes."

"Nevertheless," rejoined Mr. Fabian, "I feel sure I could train a few young voices. Chanting is easy enough when properly learned, and people who can sing one tune can soon be taught to sing another."

"It might be done," conceded the curate, "if we had any kind of instrument to lead them. As for our present band, it is far worse than nothing, for it only makes dismal noises in all sorts of time. The bass-viol is always before the flute, and the fiddle before either. I really believe the performers occasionally play in different keys, and quite independently of each other, each one being bent on distinguishing himself as crack musician of the choir."

"I quite agree with you," said Mr. Fabian; "but I think that may soon be remedied. I have ventured to send to London for a very superior harmonium, which I intend to present to the church,—if Mr. Clifford will allow me so great a privilege?"

Mr. Clifford could not well object, though he sighed as he thought how comfortable they had been with fiddle, viol, and flute before Mr. Fabian appeared upon the scene. There was one difficulty, however, and a very real one, which he felt bound to bring forward. "But, my dear sir, who will play the harmonium?"

"A very important question! Is there no one who might take a few lessons, so as to play well enough for a beginning? That Miss Dinah, the girl at the inn, has a singularly pure and flexible voice, though she has not a notion what to do with it."

"She does not know a note of music; she sings entirely from ear."

"Does not Mrs. Clifford play?"

"A little; but I am sure she would never perform in public. Besides, if she played ever so well she could not be relied on; with so many little folks and a succession of babies, she is very often kept away from chapel. I could not do it, and you could not do it, if you were to take any other part in the service."

"Well, no; one could hardly migrate from desk to organ-loft, turn and turn about; and I feel quite lost now if I do not help you a little. I don't know what we *can* do."

"Might not some one come from Chalfonts?" suggested General Seaton. "There must be people there who are musicians enough to serve our purpose. I'll pay the organist if you buy the organ, or harmonium rather, Mr. Fabian. The Redmaynes or the Musgraves must know of somebody. I should not wonder if the Duchess could help us; I'll write to her. Anyhow, it must be done; we will have a decent service of song in our chapel, eh, Mr. Clifford? We have improved of late in several particulars; but our singing is a downright disgrace."

And so it was written in the book of fate that the "trumpets and shawms," as old Jones always called the viol, fiddle, and flute, should receive their quietus, and be succeeded by a harmonium, which was to be sweet and full-toned, well supplied with stops, but not too powerful.

"And I have a great mind to run up to town myself and choose it," said Mr. Fabian; "no one else would know the exact sort of thing we want. I would go in for an organ at once, but it would be out of place in the present little poky church—'chapel' I think you call it. When we have a church worthy of the name we will see about an organ; meanwhile I am thinking about one for my own chapel at the Tower."

Both gentlemen laughed, not believing Mr. Fabian could be serious. "I would put a roof to the chapel first, if I were you, Fabian!" remarked Mr. Clifford; "and I would give the owls and bats prompt notice to quit."

"They have notice! I told them they would have to flit one of these days, pretty soon. Of course I shall roof the chapel, and put in the windows. I know of some splendid old coloured glass which is for sale in Belgium. I'll send and purchase it at once, and so make sure of it."

Of course I shall properly restore the sacred place before I put an organ in it; but I have already laid my plan, and written to a famous church architect."

"Are you in earnest?" asked the General. "It will cost a great deal of money."

"No matter; money cannot be spent in a better way. Shall I dwell in a castle while the house of the Lord lies in waste? I have examined the chapel very carefully, General, and I find it has wonderful—nay, splendid—capacities; it may be so easily restored, made just what it was in the old days before the spoiler dreamed of his work of sacrilege. The stone carving is in many parts of the church so perfect that it will be easy to copy the rest. Is there any picture of the chapel in its ancient beauty?"

"I dare say there is; I am pretty sure there is. There is an old cedar chest in the muniment-room yonder, chock full of musty papers and plans relating to the Malham lands and buildings. You are quite welcome to look them over, if you choose. I wonder I did not think of it; for there are some very curious legends and monkish chronicles, some of them in black letter, among the documents. Dr. Redmayne, the Duke, and I had them out soon after I settled here on my second marriage, and the Duke said to me—I remember it as well as if it were yesterday—'If you don't have a son of your own, Seaton; if your lands go to the Popish heir, depend upon it he will restore the chapel and cloisters of Malham as soon as ever he comes into the inheritance.' Queer that to-day there actually should be a question of restoring them. Only, for the life of me, I cannot imagine what impels you to such an onerous undertaking."

"Can you not?" replied Mr. Fabian, sadly. "Have you never contemplated what joy it must be to build up the holy places which have been by wicked and sacrilegious hands laid low? Do you not know what pain it is to see the battlements of the temple shattered, the altars desecrated, the cloisters bare and silent? To see broken arches, fallen pillars, the mantling ivy, where once the banners of battle waved above the tombs of warriors; to hear only the carol of song-birds where once the melody of chant and anthem daily rose in floods of harmony? I may

be peculiar, but I feel profoundly on this subject. In short, I could *not* live comfortably in my Tower, and not restore, if possible, to more than its pristine beauty the ruined church of Malham."

"But when you have restored it," urged Mr. Clifford, "what will you do with it? Of what use is a church without a congregation? And, unless you empty my chapel, I don't see where the worshippers are to come from. And that, you know, would be robbing Peter to pay Paul."

"Do not be afraid; the Seatondale folk would never take the trouble to go to church at Malham, unless it were now and then in the summer-time by way of change, or out of curiosity. I shall be content with a very small congregation, and I think when the time is ripe it will be found. I have little doubt, if any."

"But there is absolutely no population to form even the smallest congregation! You might have the Applethwaites now and then from Eagle Tower, which, by the way, is no tower at all, but only a farmhouse built on the foundations of the ancient peel—though, now I come to think of it, they are Methodists, or some sort of Dissenters, and they cross the fell to St. Ulpha's when they go anywhere. I fancy the farmer conducts some sort of worship in his own house; and he often has the preachers staying there, I am told."

"The more reason why there should be service at Malham Tower," replied Mr. Fabian. "I did not know about the Applethwaites, though I rode as far as their farm one day last week; and I remember now, I did see a shabby, black-coated fellow, who very likely was a bawling Methodist. He eyed me as I rode by from head to foot, and I do not think I obtained his approbation. My clerical attire probably disgusted him—the Methodist crew are not partial to Anglican priests."

"And Anglican priests are not partial to Methodists," said the General, "so on that score they are quits; and I think if I were a Methodist I should very much dislike the clergy of the Establishment, who treat the sect with disdain, and whenever it is possible hinder their work and interfere with their ministrations."

"But surely, General, you would not defend *schism*?" pleaded Mr. Fabian, in surprise.

"By no means. I abominate Dissent under any form or phase; I am a Churchman from the core of my heart. But I do say this, Fabian, I hate Romanism far more than I hate Nonconformity! I would rather tolerate a Methodist under my roof-tree than harbour a Papist. The Methodist might be vulgar or a sneak, perhaps a hypocrite; but the Papist, especially if he were a Jesuit, would be sure to be a liar, a scoundrel, a conspirator—a plausible, fair-spoken traitor!"

"Those are hard words," replied Mr. Fabian, gravely, "and you will forgive me, General, if I presume to differ. I know much of Catholics. Many of my relatives, like your own, are staunch adherents of the Church of Rome; also I have seen Catholicism under every aspect in different parts of the world, and therefore I feel myself competent to pronounce an opinion. There are many most excellent and saintly men in the communion of Rome—men whose lives of holy self-denial, sacrifice, hard toil, and ceaseless devotion are a reproach to many who call themselves teachers and pastors in the sister Church of England. I have known many such, General Seaton—men whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; men unknown to fame, unheard-of by a careless, pleasure-loving world, but known to God and approved of by Him, and beloved by saints and angels. Ah, believe me, there are many bright examples of holiness and purity in that Church which I have heard you stigmatise as apostate."

"Well, well," returned the General, fidgeting in his chair, "I spoke rashly; perhaps I was too sweeping in my condemnation. I dare say there are some good Papists, only I never met with them; though I do think that lad Aubrey means well, poor fellow! I hope there are good Papists, at all events, for if there are not, the devil will have his hands too full. Nevertheless, their religion teaches them to lie and cheat;—bless you, I know all about it. And I again repeat, I had rather have any sort of *schismatic* quartered upon me than a Roman Catholic, who is, when all is said and done, the worst schismatic of the lot."

"But your congregation?" interposed Mr. Clifford the moment the General paused. He knew by experience how fiery the old soldier frequently became when he tackled the Papists; also he did not like Mr. Fabian's pointed allusion to the clerical drones in the Anglican hive, for his conscience told him he might well be included among them. Altogether, he wished to change the subject; so he returned to the question of Malham chapel.

"Ah yes, we are forgetting that point, which is far from unimportant," replied Mr. Fabian suavely. He too desired to divert the current of conversation, which seemed likely to flow into troubled waters. The General's fierce onslaught had rather dismayed him, though he was far too practised an adept to betray himself, even by a look or tone. He spoke mildly and even sweetly as he continued—"Even supposing I gained over the Appplethwaite family, they could not often attend my services, for they are too far distant from the Tower, and the road, such as it is, must be impassable in some states of the weather. No, I do not count upon these probable Methodists; I mean to have a little colony of my own at Malham."

"He is certainly going to marry," said the General to himself, and he smiled, and looked knowingly at Mr. Clifford, who quickly caught his meaning, and nodded as he returned the glance. He, too, had reached the same conclusion.

Mr. Fabian resumed—"I have not yet so many servants and retainers as I shall require; and I find the farm buildings will accommodate a very extensive staff, if I choose to have it. But that is not all; I cannot live a life of even partial idleness; I must be hard at work. The ministry of the sanctuary will not nearly occupy my time, or absorb my energies. I have been thinking of a plan, General, which I fancy you will like. I find in the old county book you lent me the other day that three hundred years ago the monks of Malham founded a sort of school or college for the sons of indigent gentlemen; the pupils were not many, I should fancy, but they were very carefully trained, and received what, for those days, was a most liberal education; the whole affair was in connection with the Abbey of St. Bekanks. Now, what do you say to reviving the



old foundation? It would be something quite different from the monks' school, of course; quite in accordance with the spirit of the nineteenth century, and strictly on Church of England principles—*i.e.*, the Church of England as we hope to see her in the glorious future, full of energy, and strength, and fervour, and animated by a true and stedfast faith to the performance of all good works."

"I must think about it," replied the General. "It is too important a scheme to be hastily discussed. At the same time, my consent is not required, you know; the terms of your lease enable you to do what you like with the Tower, and with the ruins; you may also build to any extent you please, I suppose. I am afraid I have been rather rash in allowing you such unlimited power; you may turn the cloisters into a lazaret-house, and the Tower itself into a powder-mill, and I cannot prevent you! only you must not blow the place up—there is a clause, I believe, which forbids any work of destruction."

"No fear! you may trust me. I shall never even dream of using the place, once consecrated to holy purposes, for mere secular enterprise. Neither should I choose to undertake anything at Malham which you might feel inclined to disallow. I could not do it, if you withheld your sanction or did not give it heartily. The lease is a legal instrument, of course; but you cannot suppose I should take advantage of any of its admissions or omissions to act in opposition to your will and judgment. Think the matter over, weigh it well, and let us resume the subject in a few weeks' time. Of course the plan could not be at once carried into execution; one cannot do everything at once, and the chapel and the cloisters will engage my full attention for the present. Yes, I think I will go up to town about the harmonium, and speak to the organ-builder at the same time. I might as well run over to Belgium and have another look at the windows I think of purchasing. They are either fourteenth or fifteenth century—I am not certain which. I heard of a fine screen too, or was it a *reredos*? Either, if really good, would be valuable and worth securing."

"Shall you run down to Southerleigh!"

"I am not certain, but I think *not*; they don't want

me. There is some talk about Aubrey's marriage; have you heard anything about it, General?"

"Not I. I know nothing of my brother's family. We were always divided even as boys; then he turned Papist, and won over poor foolish Agnes to be a nun. Still we kept up something like intercourse, till I married my poor Mary, and then such things were said as could never be forgotten. Of late years, I have thought I was a good deal to blame myself,—not in my marriage, which was nothing but a blessing to me, but in the spirit I fostered towards my brother Francis; and I have no doubt the feud on both sides was nourished, if not created, by meddling priests, who for purposes of their own wished to keep a great gulf between us. Bless me! was there not a *Father Fabian* very much mixed up with the Southerleigh affairs, long ago?"

"I believe there was, and of course he was a relative of mine; but I know nothing about him. There is, or rather was, a *Father Fabian*—a Dominican, I believe—at St. Omer; he died, I think, not so very long since, though I really cannot say for certain. I have had so little to do with that branch of the family."

"The difference of religion would naturally keep you apart," returned the General. "But who is young Aubrey going to marry?"

"The lady whose name is coupled with his is the Lady Euphrasia Beaufort, only daughter and only child of the late Earl of Bayminster."

"Bayminster! was not he a regular scamp and black-leg? Did he not die ruined?"

"He was not so steady as he should have been in his youth, I know. In fact, he had seriously compromised himself on the turf before he was five-and-twenty. He fell into bad hands doubtless, for he never could manage to recover himself, and he became so deeply involved, that at one period he ran the risk of being outlawed. He repented in after years, I am told, and lived a godly and sober life; but he died in the flower of his age, leaving this only daughter a dependent on her mother's distant relatives. The next heir was a third or fourth cousin, whom the girl had never seen, and he virtuously set his

face against her from the first, as being the penniless offspring of a spendthrift, whom he could not forgive for reckless and lawless destruction of the timber."

"Poor girl! It is a pity she is not of a better stock. Does Francis approve of the match?"

"It is his pet scheme, I believe; of his own arranging. Lady Euphrasia is charming herself, and has been well brought up."

"Of course she is a Papist?"

"She would scarcely be a Protestant. The Bayminsters are of the old religion, you know, though piety was never one of their characteristics. This girl, however, is devout, and at one time wished to take the veil in the convent of which Miss Seaton is the superior. But the reverend mother did not consider that she had a *vocation*, and so she went back into the world, and will probably marry Aubrey Seaton."

"Unportioned young ladies have not often a '*vocation*,' I believe," replied the General, sarcastically. "Had the Lady Euphrasia been an heiress, she would never have been allowed to leave her convent. Pray God my little Beatrice may not become the prey of crafty priests and nuns, when I am no longer here to protect her! Her money and her broad lands will be a tempting bait. I had rather she fell into the hands of the veriest scamp of a fortune hunter; the worst husband may die, and in the world society to some extent protects an injured woman. Let the worst come to the worst, she can run away from her tyrant and hide herself. But a woman in a convent has literally no protection, and her chances of escape are but as one against a thousand. It makes my blood boil when I think of the countless religious houses, so-called, which are sprinkled about this good old England of ours, and which are *not* under Government supervision as they ought to be, if they are allowed at all! Many a dread secret of those dark prison-houses will be disclosed at the Day of Judgment. What tales of torture of mind and body, of abject slavery, of heart-sickness and life-weariness, of utter, hopeless wretchedness would the walls of many a fair-seeming nunnery tell, could they but speak! But all is silent as the grave; stone walls and stony hearts keep

their own counsel. I am sorry Aubrey is to marry this convent-bred girl, whose high birth is tarnished by her father's shame. I am sure there is the making of a manly man in that young fellow, and I've a great mind to——"

Eagerly Mr. Fabian waited to hear the sentence finished. It was most important that he should know what the General was minded to do with respect to his late heir, but no more was said. The General fell into one of his fits of abstraction and silence, and it was vain to try to engage him in further conversation. Mr. Fabian went home to his Tower, feeling that he had had to listen to a great deal that was unpleasant. "But it must be borne," he assured himself: "it must be borne meekly and patiently. Things are tending in the right direction; only I am sick of being hampered with that fool Clifford, and I must contrive to keep the General and Aubrey Seaton entirely apart. Let them fraternise, and all is lost!"

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### MR. FABIAN'S SERVANTS.

"Has suffering power to cleanse the soul?  
Though fiery ages o'er me roll,  
I'll hug the flames that round me play,  
To burn each stain of earth away."

"And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me."

MR. FABIAN went to London and purchased the very best harmonium that money could buy, of the very best maker. He journeyed also to Belgium, where he remained several weeks, being detained by unexpected business, as he explained when a few days before Christmas he made his appearance at Seatondale. He came back, however, rich in spoils—such spoils as only the initiated, the privileged few, are able to secure. He bore home in triumph to his

fortress of Malham the wonderful glass of which he had spoken—glass deeply and richly coloured, which might have glorified the sunbeams on the marble floor of the proudest cathedral. A screen, a reredos, and a quantity of carved wood-work for stalls were to follow by heavy train to Farleton. Books, bronzes, pictures also were to arrive, and a thousand things necessary, or supposed to be necessary to the new household. Some very curious articles were contained in some of the packages, so it was said; but I can scarcely believe that any one had really good ground for such an assertion, because everything was unpacked under the eye of Mr. Fabian, by Mrs. Darcy the housekeeper, and Damiano,—commonly called in the village Mr. Dam,—the trustworthy factotum, who, according to his master, could “put his hand to anything!” And neither of these worthy personages ever tattled about their employer’s concerns, or said that which the severest prudence would have left unsaid.

Indeed, of the half-dozen languages which Damiano was supposed to speak, English was the one in which he cut the poorest figure; he might have made himself understood in the kingdom of Cockaigne, perhaps; but the very pronounced North-country dialect of the Seatondalers was utterly incomprehensible, and he found it extremely difficult to convey to them any idea of what he really meant to say. If he had wished to tell his master’s secrets to the villagers, he would have been utterly nonplussed when he made the attempt. As for Mrs. Darcy, she was particularly fond of observing a rule of silence; she was habitually chary of her words, and she was never known to speak unadvisedly, or on the spur of the moment.

She was an elderly woman, though how old nobody could guess. She was tall and robust, her figure was portly, and her dark face showed the remains of considerable beauty. She was extremely clever, what the Americans have called “a woman of faculty,” and she was, as we have seen, cautious and reticent to the last degree. Was she a lady? She had the tone and manners of one; she spoke French with Mr. Fabian and Italian with Damiano; she was astonishingly well versed in ecclesiastical history, and *Mosheim* was her favourite study. Nevertheless, she did not profess

to be anything more than a servant,—Mr. Fabian's housekeeper and cook; she dressed plainly and almost meanly while busy with her work, but she came to Seatondale chapel every Sunday in a venerable satin dress, the richness and substantiality of which the Duchess of Aldinghame herself could scarcely have surpassed. Poor Mrs. Clifford, who had just decided upon the extravagance of a cheap black silk, the next time she went shopping to Lunechester,—she had not had a new dress for three years,—felt almost envious, as in shaking hands with Mrs. Darcy after service, her own worn and shabby skirts were swept by the still lustrous folds of the housekeeper's courtly robe.

And yet, Mrs. Darcy never presumed; she behaved respectfully, as became one in her position, to Mr. and Mrs. Clifford; she curtsied in her stately fashion even to little Agnes Clifford, and she was cordial, though unfamiliar, with Mrs. Jelfie, the General's housekeeper and right hand, and with Mr. Viner, the butler. She was a good deal at the Hall, sometimes wanting a recipe, sometimes giving one, and occasionally instructing Mrs. Cook in the mysteries of certain choice dishes which she had learned to prepare abroad. Some of the lower servants said she was setting her cap at Mr. Viner, who at the age of sixty was still a bachelor, having been cruelly jilted in the days of his youth by a heartless stillroom-maid. And Viner himself rather enjoyed the soft impeachment, and he hummed "We have lived and loved together" while he cleaned his plate, and sighed ominously in decanting his wines. But he knew perfectly well that Mrs. Darcy was not for him; he was nothing to her but the butler at the Hall; and she—well! she no more dreamed of marrying him than of wedding his great hero, Arthur, Duke of Wellington! Still, she came from time to time to drink tea in Mrs. Jelfie's room, and was not unfrequently escorted home through the park by Mr. Viner.

"And, of course, they would be courting by the way," said Miss Dinah, who languished for a sweetheart. "Why should they not?"

Whereupon Mrs. Fluke seriously observed that love-making was not the only world's work, though many

young people thought it was; and that if a man and woman, whose united ages amounted to a hundred and twenty and upwards, could not talk to each other sensibly and without any nonsense, it was a pity; and that was all she had to say about it. On the whole, the Seatondalers admired Mrs. Darcy, and looked up to her as "quite the lady." The General himself felt quite a respect for her, on the ground of her superb cookery and her general good management; and that she was duly prized by the master whom she served so well, there could be no doubt.

There was one person, however, who disliked and distrusted this paragon of housekeepers. She was a very humble person, and her liking or disliking would have been of very small account had she not held the responsible situation of foster-mother to the little heiress. Dolly Dent was the wife of General Seaton's shepherd, and she bore her husband a son several days before the birth of Miss Beatrice Mary. She was a fine, healthy young woman, and eminently qualified for the task she undertook, though she very naturally hesitated to leave her own baby when Mr. Lowes, the St. Ulpha's practitioner, selected her to fill the post of mother to the little lady at the Hall. She agreed, however, to accept office, more for the honour of the appointment than for the handsome stipend she was to receive, and she was accordingly installed in the nursery apartments, with a maid under her to do her bidding, and every possible comfort at her disposal.

As is not unusual in such cases, the foster-mother became passionately fond of her nursling; and as the baby thrived and began to crow and laugh and babble in baby-language, her love for it was something marvellous. The General was well pleased with her conduct, and Mrs. Jelfie and all the servants treated her with kindness and respect. She was not in the least an educated woman, but she was quick, and seemed to know many things by sheer intuition. She could neither read nor write, and she was even professedly averse to "book learning," which she persisted was the prerogative of "the quality." Yet her wits were so sharp, and her powers of observation were so keen, that in talking with her no one would have guessed her utterly illiterate condition.

When the little girl was a year old, something was said about her being weaned, but as she was extremely healthy and lively, and growing in beauty daily, it seemed a pity to make the change till absolutely expedient. The poor women of the dales generally nurse their children till they are nearly two years old, so when little missy's first birthday arrived, nothing was said about Dolly Dent's departure. The General spoke to Mrs. Clifford, who, of course, was his authority in all such matters, and her dictum was, "Oh, let the little thing have her natural diet a little longer. Dolly is such a very healthy young woman, and she comes of a good honest stock, and she is so very fond of Beatrice, it would be a thousand pities to separate them just yet, and Mr. Lowes quite thinks as I do. If you ask my advice, General, I say, decidedly, let baby keep her wet nurse for another six months or so, till she has got over the worst of her teething."

So Dolly stayed, and the baby continued to flourish, and was, as her foster-mother often declared, "as fine a bairn as if she had been born in a cottage, and never seen a silver mug, or worn an embroidered robe." Mrs. Jeliffe quite acquiesced in the arrangement, for she thought Dolly did her duty by her charge, and that a change when it did come, as come it must, could scarcely be for the better. It was only to be hoped it would not be for the worse.

And so May came round again, and day by day General Seaton found more comfort in his child, and he felt increasingly grateful to the humble woman who had done a mother's part by his bereaved infant.

One fine May evening, Mrs. Darcy arrived by invitation, to drink tea with Mrs. Jeliffe and Mr. Viner. She came in one of her rich satin dresses, for it must not be supposed that she possessed only one; she had satin and silks, and it was whispered even velvets, at discretion. Mrs. Jeliffe wore her usual company dress, or "gown," as she invariably called it—a good, well-made, but not over new black silk. Mrs. Darcy sported a rich plum-coloured satin, and lace—*real lace*—that Mrs. Seaton herself would have deemed fit for any but the grandest occasion. In fact, there was a great deal of lace in the poor lady's presses upstairs which Mrs. Jeliffe looked over every now and then



—for she kept all the keys—and which was rather inferior to that which decorated the portly person of the Malham Tower housekeeper. Round her neck was a real gold chain, and fastened, as was then the fashion, on her waistband, a real gold watch of ample dimensions.

“I suppose we may have Miss Seaton down?” said Mrs. Darcy, when the repast, which would have been called “high tea” a few years later, was ended, and the two housekeepers and the butler were lounging in their easy-chairs round the pleasant little wood fire, which was always lighted in the evening during ten months of the year, in Mrs. Jeliffe’s room.

“To be sure,” replied Mrs. Jeliffe. “Little missy always comes the last thing before she is undressed. She goes to her papa first when he is at home, and then she comes to me—that’s a rule. The General is out to-night; he’s dining quietly at Aldinghame with the Duke and Duchess, who came down the other day just for a bit of a change. Her Grace has been very ill, it seems; and the Duke is far from well. Is Mr. Fabian of the party?”

“No, Mrs. Jeliffe; my master does not affect the society of the great and noble of the world; he cares very little for rank and grandeur, though I am bound to say, he is as well descended as any nobleman in the land!—ay, and better than many a titled lord, who has come to preferment by vulgar riches only. You must have noticed that my master is a very religious man—a remarkably religious man I may say, and he prefers to serve God in retirement.”

“No doubt, Mrs. Darcy; Mr. Fabian is as you say a very pious man; but his piety need not prevent him from dining in a friendly way with the Duke and Duchess of Aldinghame. It’s not a grand party, or *my* master would not be there, for, as you know, he has not gone into society since my blessed mistress’s death.”

“There are some, you know, who feel bound to live a holy, retired life—a life of prayer and good works; and such an one my honoured master loves to live.”

“Your master must be a very rich man?”

“I suppose he is; I have heard he is, but I could not

say for certain. However, facts speak for themselves; he *spends* a great deal, and *how* does he spend it, Mrs. Jeliffe, and Mr. Viner? Why, in doing good, and to the glory of God! In restoring churches, and building schools, and colleges, and hospitals; in helping the poor and needy, in comforting the sorrowful, and in ministering to the sick and afflicted! Ah, my master is a blessed man! If ever there was a saint in the flesh, it is he."

"But," said Mr. Viner, "if he is so enormously rich, as he seems to be, it's not so very much to his credit what he spends on churches and the like. I once knew a lady who did a great deal of good, and she was ever so poor, although she was a lady born, and educated as a lady should be. She could give but very little money, but she could give herself, and that she did do. I've known her go without a meal that she might be able to give it to somebody who was more in need of it than herself. I've known her sit up all night with a poor sick body that had led a shameful life; I've known her tidy up a poor woman's house, and wash the children, and sweep the floor; I might go on all night telling you what that blessed woman did, and yet no one knew much about it till she was in her grave. That's what the Bible calls pure religion, and undefiled, I should say. But here's our little lady."

Dolly Dent came in with her bonnie nursling in her arms. She gave the child to Mrs. Jeliffe, and then stood behind the housekeeper's chair, exactly opposite to Mrs. Darcy, and—almost without herself being conscious of the fact—intently watched her. Between the two women, who were so utterly unlike, there was an unexpressed but eventually acknowledged antagonism. Dolly disliked and distrusted Mrs. Darcy. Mrs. Darcy had a very strong, and, as it would appear, a very unreasonable aversion to Dolly. And yet no one could lay any fault to Mrs. Darcy's door. She was exemplary in all her conduct; and as for Dolly, it would have been very difficult to bring against her the smallest accusation. As Job Dent's wife, and as little Beatrice's foster mother, she was equally irreproachable. Baby Beatrice was in tremendous spirits, as children often are just before their bed-time, and she plunged, and

kicked, and laughed, and pulled Mrs. Jeliffe's false curls, to the admiration of all her worshippers.

"I wonder if she will come to me?" said Mrs. Darcy, holding out her arms. Dolly made an involuntary movement, as if to snatch away her nursling, and Mrs. Darcy noticed it. But the little one pouted and turned away—she was just old enough to be bashful with strangers. Mrs. Darcy continued her blandishments, till at length the child, attracted by the shimmer of a pearl and gold brooch she wore in her white net neckerchief, which was elaborately folded over her ample shoulders, condescended to point to the ornament with her tiny finger.

"Pitty! pitty!" said little Beatrice, in her charming baby accents, and she put out her chubby hand, expecting to receive the prize. Now the brooch, with its sharp pin, was scarcely a safe plaything, so the two ladies tried to divert her attention in orthodox nursery fashion, jingling a bunch of keys, holding up pussy, and beating a tattoo on the table. But Miss Beatrice showed herself to be her papa's own daughter; with rare persistency in so tiny a creature, she was not to be diverted from her object, and again and again she tried to possess herself of the coveted ornament. She did not scream or cry—she was a wonderfully good-tempered child—but she shouted and made darts at Mrs. Darcy's dress in a way that exceedingly amused the party. Suddenly, as if inspired with abrupt determination, a sort of *coûte qui coûte* resolve to have her baby-will, she gave one spring which launched her on to Mrs. Darcy's lap, while she thrust her little hand into the recesses of the snowy kerchief, and caught something which the lady wore round her neck, and before any one could interfere, had dragged forth a gold and enamel crucifix, which she held tightly clenched, screwing up her face, ready to burst into a fit of violent crying if deprived of her strange treasure.

Mrs. Darcy coloured, but said quite calmly, "Oh, naughty little missy, you have seized what I allow no one even to touch—my precious cross."

Mr. Viner contemplated the crucifix very earnestly.

Mrs. Jeliffe remarked, "She does snatch at things, little Puss! She won't hurt it, Mrs. Darcy, if you hinder her

from putting it in her mouth—teething children bite so hard, you know. What a pretty thing it is, and valuable, no doubt; but I thought only Papists wore crucifixes?”

“My husband was a Roman Catholic,” replied Mrs. Darcy. “He was an Irishman, and deeply devoted to the old faith. I have worn this crucifix—before which, poor dear man, he prayed morning and night—ever since his death. And I shall never part with it.”

“Of course not. But how came you to marry a Romanist, Mrs. Darcy; were you not afraid?”

“Afraid of what?” asked Mrs. Darcy, with a laugh.

“Well, I hardly know, but as a rule they are so designing and so thoroughly under priestly influence. They tell everything, however private, in confession, you know.”

“They tell all their sins, of course, but nothing else. The tales we hear and read about the confessional are mere romance, got up to make a sensation: some of them are so scandalous that no person with any sense of propriety could possibly speak of them without shame. There are bad Catholics as well as good, of course, but I know from experience that they are terribly maligned, more out of ignorance than malice, I would fain believe. I saw a great deal of what you call Romanism during my husband’s lifetime.”

“I wonder he did not make you a Papist.”

“He never tried to make me anything, he was quite satisfied with me as I was, and I, for my part, was never inclined to change my religion. We were very happy, and a better husband never lived. My sister married a Protestant, and led a most miserable life, so you see there are good and bad on both sides.”

“To be sure there are,” replied Mrs. Jeliffe. “I should be very sorry to think Catholics are *all* bad. Thank the Lord, there will be all sorts in heaven! But they don’t think they go straight to heaven, do they? There’s purgatory! Now what is supposed to go on there?”

“Men suffer torments much greater than any torment in this world, so the Church says: I only know what I have read, and what my husband told me. They suffer till they have atoned for their sins, till they are fully purified, and fit to enter heaven.”

"And how long do folks stay in purgatory?" asked Mr. Viner.

"How long? That depends of course upon the life they led on earth.\* The Church teaches that for every venial sin there must be at least one day in purgatory; and supposing that every one commits thirty faults every day, that gives thirty days of purgatory to every day on earth; to every year, thirty years; to fifty years, one thousand five hundred years; to sixty, one thousand eight hundred years! Add to these venial sins all the mortal sins committed in a tolerably long life, and it is impossible to say how long the pains of purgatory may endure."

Mrs. Darcy did not add, what the Church also teaches, that "you may wipe off the whole account with small mortifications in this life." Nor did she further inform her auditors how, according to the "Month of Mary," a nun went to purgatory for something said in a whisper in choir; a *religieux* for not bowing his head at the "Gloria Patri" at the end of the Psalms; a holy virgin for *washing her face with too much nicety upon a Friday*; St. Peregrinus and St. Paschasius for the very smallest faults; St. Valerius, Bishop of Augusta, for *a little too much affection towards his nephew!* &c., &c. And I think she showed the wisdom of the serpent, if not the innocence of the dove, in thus withholding the information she herself possessed.

"It's a rummy religion, that!" observed Mr. Viner, when Mrs. Darcy ceased.

"It's very foolish, I must say," was Mrs. Jelfe's rejoinder.

"It's an awful religion!" burst out Dolly, her cheeks crimson, and her eyes sparkling. "It's a religion that did ought to be put down! Give me the blessed child, Mrs. Darcy; I can't stand and let her hear such shocking lies and stuff. Doesn't the blood of Jesus Christ cleanse from all sin? And ain't we forgiven for His sake, and through Him don't we, when we die, go to be for ever with the Lord? No purgatory for me! Come along, my lamb, it's time you were undressed and asleep. Come along, my precious."

And without more ado, Dolly bore her nursling off to her own quarters.

\* See "Month of Mary," 25th Day.

When Mrs. Darcy was putting on her bonnet, she said, in a confidential tone, to Mrs. Jeliffe, "If I were you, I would have little missy weaned; that Dolly Dent is not quite the person to bring up a young lady; I have always understood that children, to a large degree, take after the people that nurse them, especially when they are over the twelvemonth. And though Dolly is as good as gold, I am sure, yet one would not like little missy to grow up anything but a real lady."

And then followed a great deal more, all tending to convince Mrs. Jeliffe that Dolly ought to be cashiered.

Strange to say, Mr. Fabian, whom one would have supposed knew nothing and cared nothing about babies and their physical needs, very soon after his housekeeper's visit to the Hall, gravely set before the General the evil consequences which might accrue to his heiress if she were longer nourished by a lowly-born, illiterate peasant woman!

When midsummer arrived, Dolly Dent was at home again with her husband and her own child; and there was a new queen of the nursery, a sort of *gouvernante*—a Frenchwoman, who answered to the name of Mademoiselle Annette!

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### MISGIVINGS.

"Virgin of all virgins!  
To thy shelter take us;  
Gentlest of the gentle!  
Chaste and gentle make us."

HYMN TO THE B.V.M.

FIVE years had passed away, and Baby Beatrice was a bonnie little maiden, making the old rooms and corridors of Seaton Hall resound with her childish shouts and laughter, and her merry songs. She was a peculiarly healthy child, singularly good-tempered, generous, frank, lively, and, as Mrs. Jeliffe declared, as full of mischief as

an egg was full of meat. She was, on the whole, docile enough, and generally obedient; but the little lady had a spirit of her own, and resented the tone of command, or the semblance of coercion, from any one save her father and Mr. Fabian. The General grew fonder and fonder of his daughter as she increased in age and stature, till at length he could scarcely bear her out of his sight, and she was to be seen at all times of the day, and under all possible circumstances, trotting about at his side, either holding his hand or mounted on her shaggy pony, which she sat to perfection when only five years old.

And more and more the General confined himself to Seatondale, seldom going further from town than Chalfont and St. Ulpha's, and counting a visit to Lunechester as an event to be remembered. The fine old soldier was failing rapidly; he still bore himself in his stately fashion, but he was not as erect as when Beatrice Mary was born, and his keen dark eyes, though still strong and piercing, had lost their sparkle and that far-seeing look which gave them so penetrating an expression. Nor could General Seaton toil over hill and dale, nor keep in the saddle for hours together, any longer. He complained of being tired after any slight exertion; he went to sleep continually over his favourite authors, and over the leaders of the *Times*, and over the Parliamentary debates, even when certain political crises were impending. He seemed quite happy and contented as long as he could hear the merry prattle of his child, and watch her at her play among the flower-beds, or with her doll's house, which somehow had come to a permanent settlement in the oak parlour, where the General spent most of his time, and where he nearly always took his meals, which were timed so as to suit the exigencies of his youthful companion. Gradually the late dinner was dispensed with, and Beatrice and her father dined together quietly and plainly at one o'clock. She breakfasted with him, of course, Mrs. Jeliffe taking care that her young lady should be served with simple and wholesome fare; and at five in the afternoon tea was taken in great style, Miss Beatrice making a show of presiding over the cups and saucers, though her tiny fingers could scarcely grasp the handle of the teapot. Papa "helped," however, and some-

how tea was got over without much trouble, catastrophes, which do occasionally befall grown-up ladies, happening only now and then to the small autocrat of the General's tea-table.

One bright July evening Miss Beatrice came in from the garden rather later than usual. The tea was growing cold, and the General, tired of nodding over his *Blackwood*, had fairly succumbed, and fallen fast asleep in his arm-chair. He slept so soundly that his daughter had to climb upon his knee and pat his face before she could awake him. "Naughty papa! to go to sleep before bed-time!" said the child, shaking her curls at him as slowly he awoke and rubbed his eyes.

"What! are you there, little pussy-cat? Dear me, dear me! I must have been dreaming; I thought I was in Spain! Is tea ready?"

"Oh, yes, and more than ready. Please to help me pour out." And Miss Seaton scrambled up on to her high chair at the head of the table, and began to put sugar and cream into her father's cup, her own portion of new milk standing ready to her hand. "Papa! I could hold that heavy teapot as well as you," said the child; "you left all the weight of it to me, and oh, papa, you bad papa! don't you see your cup is full and running over? There is a fine mess upon the tray."

"I think we might have a smaller teapot, Beattie: this old silver one is too ponderous for your little fingers, and between us we make, as you say, a fine mess of it."

"No, no, papa, dear, not between us; *you* made the mess all by yourself! You did not seem to know when to stop pouring. Please to pass the jam and the honey."

"Jam and honey won't go well together, my queen."

"I don't want them to! But I like to have them both ready, so that I may choose. No I won't take honey to-night. I'll have apricot jam. I wanted pine-apple jam, but Jeliffe said it was too rich for me, so late in the evening."

"And she was right, my pet. Rich, sweet things are not good for little people, especially at their last meal."

"It is not my last meal, papa. Of course, so old as I am, I take supper."



"*Supper!* Mademoiselle ought not to give you supper, puss."

"Mademoiselle can't help it, papa, because I order it, and I am mistress, you know."

"So it seems," said the General, much amused; "but for all that, little mistress, you are too young to eat suppers. What is your supper made of?"

"*Milk*, in a tea-cup, and two biscuits, or else a bit of oatcake. Jeliffe won't allow anything more."

"Quite right. That won't hurt you, pet; Jeliffe is a sensible woman."

"She is not so sensible—not so nice, I mean—as Mademoiselle! *She* gets me little *plats*—very little *plats*, you know, sometimes. But, oh dear! I was not to tell!"

"Gets you *what*? And why are you not to tell?"

"Little *plats* she gets me when I am very good and give her no trouble. Sweetbreads, you know, and chicken something, with sauce. Last night I had *haricot*."

"That won't do," said the General, rousing up. "*Haricot* is not good for little people. When I was a little boy I never had *haricot* or *petits plats* of any kind. Beatrice, my darling, you must keep to your milk and biscuits, and I must speak to Mademoiselle."

"Oh, please *don't*, papa! Mademoiselle Annette does not like to be 'spoken to.' It makes her ever so cross, and when she is cross I can't bear it. I'll keep to the milk and biscuits, papa, if you say so; but don't say anything about the *petits plats*, please."

"Very well; I'll think about it. Now you have finished your apricot jam, you may have some ripe raspberries. What made you so late this evening?"

"The lilies, the white lilies, papa; those that grow in mamma's garden, you know. And what do you think? Mademoiselle and William, the gardener, quarrelled about them."

"Quarrelled about the white lilies?"

"Yes; Mademoiselle made me gather some. '*Cueillez donc, des lis, ma petite,*' she said, and I gathered a lot; they smelt so sweet. Then Mademoiselle said they were the Blessed Virgin's own flowers, and sacred to her. And she taught me such a pretty verse, in English."

"What was it? Can you say it now?"

"Oh, yes. It was—

" 'Ave Maria! blessed maid!  
Lily of Eden's fragrant shade,  
Who can express the love  
That nursed thee——'

No, that is not quite it, and I forget the rest. But William was busy in the borders, and heard her, and he said the lilies had nothing to do with the Virgin Mary, though they had to do with Jesus Christ. And he said a verse, too, only it was out of the Bible—it was, 'Consider the lilies,' I think—and I think, too, there was something about Solomon. And then Mademoiselle and William got to talking, and William called Mademoiselle bad names."

"Indeed! I am sorry to hear it; sorry that William should use bad language, and still more sorry that my little girl should hear it. I thought I could trust William."

"Perhaps it was not so very bad, but Mademoiselle was horribly angry. He said, 'You are a Papist, Mam'selle; yes, a *Papist*, I say!' And then Mademoiselle screamed out, 'And you are a *Methodist*, and the devil will take you when you die.'"

"Indeed, I think it was Mademoiselle who used bad language. She ought to keep her temper."

"What is a Methodist, papa?"

"I cannot tell you, my pet, for I could not make you understand."

"Does the devil take all the Methodists, papa? Will he take William?"

"No, no! Don't bother your little head about such stuff. People ought not to be Methodists, I suppose; but still they *may* go to heaven."

"I am so glad, for I love William, and I am sure he is very good. But what is a *Papist*, papa?"

"That I cannot explain, pussy. But I had far rather see you a Methodist than a Papist. Never have anything to do with Papists, little one! I can't tell you why now, but remember what I say, and be sure that I do not speak without reason. When you are a grown-up woman, and mistress of Seatondale, and can do as you like, keep clear of the Papists, and have nothing at all to say to them."

"But Mademoiselle is not a Papist, papa?"

"Certainly not; if she were, I would not have her here. William was mistaken, and I do not much wonder, for all that talk about the Virgin has a queer sound in the ears of Protestants of the old-fashioned sort."

"I like the Virgin, papa. Mademoiselle tells me such pretty stories about her."

"What sort of stories, queenie?"

"Shall I tell you one of them? There was once a dear little girl about as big as I am, and her name was Dominica. She was so good that she never did any naughty things. She never went into a passion, she did as she was told; and she loved the Blessed Virgin and her Son, Jesus Christ. One Saturday, when she had said all her lessons, instead of playing she made two pretty crowns of sweet flowers, one for Mary and one for Jesus, and then she prayed to Jesus and Mary to come and smell them. But they did not come, and Dominica was sorry, and cried. Then she went to the window, and saw a lady dressed like a beggar, with a poor little baby in her arms, and they both asked Dominica to give them something, and the child had such sore places in both his hands. While Dominica went to get them something, they both came into the house, and then she saw that the little boy was hurt in both his feet as well as in his poor hands. And when he saw the pretty crowns of flowers, he begged for them, and his mother gave them to him to smell. And she said to Dominica, 'Why did you crown these images with roses?' And Dominica said it was because she loved Jesus and His mother so much. Then the beggar-woman said, 'How much do you love them, Dominica?' And Dominica said, 'As much as ever I can.' Then the wounds of the little beggar-boy smelt ever so sweet, and while they all talked together, his face began to shine like the sun, and there was a crown of stars on the lady's head, and Dominica knew that they were not really beggars, but Jesus and Mary come to smell her flowers. So Jesus threw the flowers all over Dominica, and told her He would love her always, and then the Virgin and Jesus vanished away. And Dominica, when she grew up, became a holy nun, and now she is called 'Dominica of Paradise.' That is all I can

remember ; but there is a lot more. Mademoiselle often tells me that story. Is it not a pretty one, papa ? ”

“ It is great nonsense, and a pack of lies,” replied the General, greatly discomposed ; “ and I won’t have you listen to such stuff. There never was any such person as Dominica, and Jesus Christ went up into heaven a man, and not a little child. I begin to think William is right—Mademoiselle is more than half a Papist, at any rate. She and I must have a few words together.”

Beatrice having finished her tea, slipped down and began to arrange her lilies, while the General continued to muse on what his little girl had told him, and his reflections were very far from agreeable.

For some time past General Seaton had been exercised in his mind concerning his daughter’s *gouvernante*, Mademoiselle Annette. She had been at Seatondale now five years, and had conducted herself on the whole in the most exemplary manner. She was devoted to her little charge, whom she managed admirably, and she trained her to obedience, and nice ladylike habits. Her French was of the purest, and that, of course, was an immense advantage, the little one catching up the language quite naturally, and without any trouble to herself. Beatrice, on her part, was fond of Mademoiselle, though decidedly afraid of displeasing her, and she believed implicitly in all that she taught her, and delighted in the “ pretty stories ” which were generally the reward of extra good behaviour.

Mademoiselle Annette had a large collection of coloured pictures, among them many portraits of saints, especially female saints ; also sketches of charming children led blindfold by guardian angels over dangerous places ; interiors of churches filled with prostrate worshippers ; altars, with rows of tapers blazing through clouds of incense ; processions of village maidens ; scenes illustrative of church history ; and, above all, a beautiful water-colour copy of Murillo’s well-known Assumption of the Virgin. And in these Beatrice delighted, though as she was shown at the same time Adam and Eve turned out of Paradise, Noah sending out his dove from the Ark, Daniel in the den of lions, Blind Bartimeus receiving his sight, &c., &c.,

together with scenes from English history, such as Alfred letting the cakes burn, John signing Magna Charta, the little Princes asleep in the Tower, and so on, she did not dwell exclusively on the glaringly Popish pictures, nor talk of them to her papa.

And truth to tell, the General's perceptions were no longer of the quickest; it took a good deal now to rouse him to the full consideration of any subject. With his child he was generally lively and talkative, but apart from her, a sort of torpor seemed continually to creep over his faculties, and arguments, in which of old he delighted, became a weariness and a burden to him. Mr. Fabian's influence over him was immense, and yet, strange to say, it abruptly terminated at a given point. The Jesuit had completely succeeded in making of him a very pronounced High Churchman, or what would now be so called; but not one step further could he draw him towards the stronghold of Rome itself.

"I am too old to go on a new tack in these things," said he, wearily, one day, when Mr. Fabian remonstrated with him for speaking with a good deal of *animus* against Romanism, as such. "I am an old soldier, and I don't understand serving two masters. I love my English Church, and I am thankful to behold her roused from her long apathy, and about to enter into the lists against the aggressions of Dissent; I am glad to see her opposing her lawful powers and her noblest energies to this beggarly Methodism, which threatens, by winning the hearts of the common people, to flood the country; but, sir, *I hate Rome!* I know too much of her not to hate her; and if I thought this reform in Church matters tended Romewards, I swear by God I would at once plant my foot nor go one step further in the movement, and I would turn back to slovenly services, old Jonas's 'trumpets and shawms,' and Sternhold, and Hopkins, to-morrow!"

And then Mr. Fabian spoke soothingly: "Nay, my friend, calm yourself. Because Rome has done some things which Anglicans have, in their sloth and ignorance, left undone, shall we blame either her who has led the way, or they who have followed? May we not learn something even from error itself? It seems to me that there

is something worthy of imitation in these benighted Dissenters even—they are so much and so deeply in earnest.”

“Well, well!” replied the General, almost petulantly; “I won’t fall foul of the ‘*Mother of Harlots*,’ if she will let me and mine alone. But—plague take her!—she has got so confoundedly impudent, and she has so many wiles, that one never knows when one is right clear of her. If there is any real good in her—which I doubt—let the English Church copy the good; but, for Heaven’s sake! let her never copy the seeming good or the covert evil, or it is all over with her. The day that Rome and England coalesce hears pronounced the doom of our National Church of England.”

And in those days, you must understand, no one ventured to whisper of disestablishment, unless it were Mr. Miall and a few of his confederates, who were absolutely *nowhere*! Therefore, the General’s speech was rather startling, even to Mr. Fabian. Nowadays, it would be no more than remarking that “Queen Anne is dead.”

Left alone, when his little girl went away with her dolls and her lilies—one of the dollies had somehow got to be named St. Theresa—the General did very seriously set himself to reflect upon certain matters which had, at different times, more or less impressed him. He sat a long time, till the gathering twilight closed around him, and the sweet scent of the blossoming limes stole in through the open windows, and he tried to think clearly, impartially, and consecutively.

“God help me!” he cried at last, rubbing his eyes like one who tries to clear away a mist which he cannot comprehend. “I cannot think like I used to think; my powers of thought are growing feeble: I can recollect nothing—nothing clearly. I suppose it is all an illusion; old people are subject to foolish fancies, to mere crazes, I know, and I am an old man now—my days are numbered. Well, so be it—I want to go home to God, I want to be with Him; I want to know—with all reverence, I want to know what there is on the other side. I am tired of this side. I think I have been tired ever since my poor Mary died. God’s will be done. But my little one, my helpless child—I must leave her behind. Oh! my God, but Thou art the Father

of the fatherless ; I leave her in Thy hands ; keep her from all evil—all evil of the soul as well as the body. Still, while I have my strength and can exercise my mind and will, I must *act*. Our great Captain does not promise to help the lazy ones, and there are things I must see into. I have for some time distrusted Mademoiselle Annette. Suppose she should be a Jesuit in disguise ? Jesuits *do* creep into houses, I know ; and there are Jesuits of both sexes, and my darling is a prize worth their striving for. Yet Fabian vouched for her—Fabian has known her for years ! It cannot be. But—oh ! my God ! *my God !* what if Fabian himself—a sudden light flashes on me—what, what—— ? ”

And for another hour, half-dazed as it were, the old man sat in the growing darkness, pondering many things. At times, he seemed to read the cipher clearly ; then again his senses appeared to wander, and he was ready to call himself the fool of fools.

“ Who shall I suspect next ? ” he said sadly, as he rang for his servant. “ Old age should not be suspicious. An old soldier should know better. I will trust,—I *will* trust Fabian. And yet, oh my God, if I have been deceived ! And the risk is so great, and my time here so short.”

One thing he determined on—“ he would send for his old safe ally, Mrs. Clifford ; she was Mary’s friend, and she had never approved of the innovations which had rather charmed and dazzled the ignorant Seatondalers,”—though at the same time they had strengthened the ranks of the Methodists. Mademoiselle should go—she should be honourably dismissed, but *she should go !* and a safe Protestant governess—a real lady, who, under Mrs. Clifford’s motherly supervision, might educate the heiress worthily, should immediately be engaged. As for Fabian himself, he would watch—yet no,—*no !* that could not be ! “ I will do it to-morrow,” said the General, when he lay down in his bed. But to-morrow found him struck down by paralysis.

## CHAPTER XX.

## THE FEMALE JESUIT.

“The soul’s dark cottage, battered and decayed,  
Lets in new light through chinks that time has made.  
Stronger by weakness, wiser men become,  
As they draw near to their eternal home ;  
Leaving the old, both worlds at once they view,  
That stand upon the threshold of the new.”

ALL now was confusion at Seaton Hall ; Mr. Fabian was absent, paying one of his mysterious visits in Belgium, and no one seemed willing to assume the sudden responsibilities of the hour. Mrs. Jeliffe, of course, took her place in her master’s room, assisted by Mr. Viner, and Dr. Wilson was hastily summoned by an express messenger ; but everybody seemed too frightened to be of much use, and Mr. Clifford was the first to suggest that Mr. Aubrey Seaton should be sent for, or at least apprised of the melancholy state of his uncle. Mademoiselle Annette was the only person who had her wits about her ; but the patient, who soon recovered partial consciousness, evinced so much irritation at the sight of her that she was fain to accede to the housekeeper’s request, that she would not again present herself in the sick chamber. She, however, strongly opposed the idea of sending for Aubrey Seaton, declaring that it was the chance mention of his name, and not any sick man’s prejudice against herself, which had caused the General’s unintelligible annoyance. And Mrs. Jeliffe, who was a most faithful creature, but not gifted with keen perceptions, could not precisely contradict her, though, as she said afterwards to the butler, “It wasn’t about Mr. Aubrey, I feel sure, Mr. Viner ; it was hearing Mam’selle’s voice that troubled my master. Still, I could not say positively, you know.”

“It would never do to send for Mr. Aubrey,” replied Mr. Viner, under his breath : “the master can’t bear the idea of having Papists about him. I don’t believe he would die



in peace with one of them Romanists near his bed. Any way, I won't second the move, Mrs. Jelfie. Let Mr. Clifford do as he thinks best."

"I'd rather go by Mrs. Clifford ; she's got more judgment than his Reverence, by far."

"She ain't what's called a clever woman, I suppose," replied the butler, "but she's got plenty of common sense, and a little common sense, I have found all my life, goes farther than a good deal of wit. Now, Mam'selle is very sharp."

"Too sharp for me," interrupted Mrs. Jelfie, who had never taken quite kindly to the elderly *gouvernante*. "I don't like folks that know, or pretend to know everything, and poke their noses into other people's concerns. I don't like them that watch you like a cat does a mouse, saying very little, but taking note of all that's said and done. I never did like the French, though Mrs. Darcy says it's all my 'insular prejudice,' whatever that may be."

"It's good for little missy to catch the *parley-vous* early, you know. It's very pretty to hear her patter away to Mam'selle."

"I'd rather hear her patter honest English ! No good ever comes of women prating in foreign tongues. And it don't please me to hear her and Mam'selle jabbering away about I don't know what. It's my belief Mam'selle teaches the child to laugh at me. I wish Mr. Fabian were at the Tower."

"Do you ?" returned the butler gravely. "I am not sure that I do."

"Why not ? He is the General's closest friend ; nobody else knows his affairs half as well."

Mr. Viner made no distinct reply, but he looked unutterable things, and he muttered something that sounded very much like "*more's the pity !*" Mrs. Jelfie knew from his looks that he would not explain further : she, therefore, wisely forebore to ask any questions.

Dr. Wilson had called in a celebrated medical man, whose opinion entirely coincided with his own. The General would not die, but he would never again recover the use of his left side ; his senses were already slowly returning, and he was beginning to speak, though with diffi-

culty, but his brain would always be weak, and another seizure, or at the most two, would terminate his career.

"I hope the General has settled all his worldly affairs?" said the Ribbleton physician, as he and Dr. Wilson drove back to Chalfonts. "He may rally to some extent—indeed, I am tolerably sure he will, and speedily too; but he will certainly lack clearness in any judgment he may have to form, and I should not be surprised if his memory became extremely defective."

"I fancy all arrangements have been made," said Dr. Wilson. "Of course, I do not know absolutely; the General is not a man to talk of his private affairs to any one, but he did say something to me one day about the folly of men putting off their *post-mortem* arrangements till it was too late. I do not doubt that his will was made years ago; of course, he leaves everything to his little daughter."

"Of course. But I wonder who will be named her guardian?"

"Mr. Fabian, certainly; and he will be sole trustee and executor. He is like a son to the General."

"Do you know what folks call your Mr. Fabian?"

"Not I!"

"The Monk of Malham Tower."

"They are not very far wrong, I think. What a place the fellow has made of that old ruin! he must be immensely rich. And this school which he has founded, or rather revived—for it really is an ancient institution of the Seatons, it seems—must cost a good deal."

"It is said the rule of Malham Tower is essentially Popish."

"In spirit, I should say it is. But, what then? This Puseyism, Tractarianism, or whatever you may call it—Fabian calls it *Anglo-Catholicism*—is only a modified, disguised Popery, intended to bring back the Church of England to what she was before the Reformation. Fabian is not more pronounced than others. I hear fine accounts of what is going on in London and in the large towns generally. An old friend of mine is breaking her heart because her only daughter persists in joining an Anglican sisterhood."

"There really are such things, I suppose?"

"That there are! Why, Dr. Marlowe, how is it that you, who are so much more in the busy world than I, do not hear of the advances of this new school, or creed, or whatever you may style it?"

"Oh, I hear plenty, but I don't always believe what I hear. Some of the stories that are told cannot be true; for instance, it is currently reported in certain circles that *confession* is being revived in the Church of England; that many persons—ladies especially—confess to their clergyman regularly, as a religious duty. I can't quite take that in."

"I can. I would lay you anything that the pupils at Malham are strictly trained to confession. Bless you, lots of these Puseyites go to confession, in a quiet way; and there are little books being privately printed and circulated by hundreds, everywhere; books intended to indoctrinate the young and the unwary with Popish doctrines. I have seen '*Hours, for the Use of Members of the English Church*,' and my sister found in her governess's possession the other day a charming little pamphlet, entitled, '*How to Prepare for a First Confession*.' Let me see; we are in the year 1850. If this sort of thing goes on unchecked, the Church of England will not have much Protestantism left in it by 1870. I should not wonder if confession be not openly practised and enjoined in Episcopal communions by that time."

"Confession will never go down in England," rejoined Dr. Marlowe. "The person who tried to confess my womenkind would be a bold man. I would horsewhip him for a Papist priest in disguise."

"Then you would make a martyr of him! And if you take to horsewhipping all the disguised Jesuits you scent out in the Established Church you won't have much time for the exercise of your profession."

"If you hold these opinions, why don't you speak out?"

"I am speaking out at this moment, I speak out at every convenient opportunity; but what does it all come to? People only smile, and cannot see the danger. Then I have to do with people's bodies, and not with their souls; patho-

logy and not theology is what I must attend to. As for our own rector, he is a worthy man as ever lived, and about equally afraid of Rome and of Geneva."

"You don't *really* think this Mr. Fabian of the Tower is a Jesuit?"

"Well, I hope not, for little missy's sake. If she were perverted to the faith of her ancestors, I think the General would never rest in his grave."

"It's a pity; and such a fine estate, too. However we medical men need not concern ourselves about it. We shall pull our patient through, and then, if he is able to comprehend, I think some one of his friends might give him a judicious hint, and get him to appoint at least a second guardian, a co-trustee, of whose Protestantism there can be no doubt."

And so the gentlemen talked, as so many people do talk, and will talk to the end of time, and nothing whatever came of their conversation; only it showed how the current was setting in, and in after years they both recalled what was said in that drive over the fells, on that sultry July day in 1850, and chuckled, especially Dr. Wilson, at their own sagacity and prescience.

But General Seaton, though sadly shaken and enfeebled, was far more fully in possession of his senses than those about him at all supposed. In fact, he knew all and understood all that passed around him, and though his speech continued for some days to be extremely inarticulate, his mind grew hourly clearer, and he was able to think calmly on many subjects, and to think to a good purpose. At the time of his seizure the weather was extraordinarily sultry, and he seemed greatly oppressed by the heat and the close, heavy atmosphere. While this lasted, he made little apparent progress; but on the sixth day of his illness a tremendous thunderstorm broke over Seatondale, and, while it did some damage, cleared and cooled the air, and brought down the temperature to an endurable degree.

On the evening of the day during which the storm raged, the invalid seemed wonderfully restored, and during the night he improved so much that all his attendants were surprised and rejoiced to hear him speak once

more—thickly and brokenly, it is true, but quite intelligibly. Once, when something was said about Mr. Fabian's probable return, he replied that the worst was over, and that he was quite able to give his own orders. A few hours afterwards he wished to see Mrs. Clifford, as soon as she conveniently could spare the time, and he desired Mrs. Jeliffe to convey a message to her to that effect.

"Whatever can he want with you, Emily?" said Mr. Clifford, when his wife told him she was going to the Hall. "I wonder if his mind wanders at all?"

"He is quite himself, Mrs. Jeliffe says. He wishes to say something about the child, I dare say. I am not surprised."

Mrs. Clifford lost no time in obeying the General's summons, and she found him a great deal better than she had ventured to expect. He received her with an eagerness he could not disguise, and he thanked her with evident gratitude for coming to him so speedily.

"For I had quite determined to have some talk with you," he continued, "before the attack came on; I intended coming to you, or begging you to come to me early on the following day. Long before my people here imagined that I was sensible, I was thinking over what had exercised my mind prior to my illness, and I prayed earnestly that my faculty of speech might be restored so far as to enable me to say to you much that lies heavily on my heart. I know I may trust you, my dear wife's old friend!"

"Surely, surely, General! Only, if it is anything of real importance, I am afraid you have chosen a poor councillor. Could not my husband help you——?"

"It is woman's advice and woman's help that I want. It is of the child I would speak."

"I saw her on the terrace as I came in. She looked well and blooming, only longing to be with 'papa' again."

"My poor darling! She does not know how near she has been to losing papa out of her little life altogether. She does not know—why should she?—how short a time we have to be together,—she and I."

"Do not look on the dark side, General. You are so much better, that I quite anticipate a speedy recovery to at

least partial health and strength. You may be your daughter's protector for many years yet to come."

"Not so. I am rallying now, I know. My mind seems even clearer than before the seizure, and my memory fails me less. God has mercifully given me a little time wherein to do what I ought to have done before, to prepare myself and others for the great change that is not far off. Will you oblige me by looking into the dressing-room, and locking the outer door of that room, so that no one can approach that way? Thank you! now please go gently to the other door and look up and down the corridor. There is no one loitering about?"

"No one. Oh yes, Mr. Viner is sitting in the deep window-seat at the end of the gallery."

"He sits there by my orders, to keep the coast clear while our conference lasts. I want no listeners. Lock *that* door, if you please."

Mrs. Clifford obeyed, wondering greatly what all this preparation and secrecy portended. He spoke with so much composure that she could not suppose him to be even slightly delirious, but she took her seat at his side with some little trepidation. Mrs. Seaton had been to her as a dear sister, but she had always felt a certain awe in associating with the General, who seldom unbent from his ordinary polite but cold formality and proud reserve.

"I want to make a change in my household," he said, lowering his voice as he spoke, till she could scarcely catch the words. "As I said, my time here is short; the hand of death is upon me; I feel it, and I want this to be done before I go. You can and will do what I wish."

"I will do whatever I can, I promise you. What is it you wish? If it be possible for me to do it, *count it done*."

"Thank you! I knew Emily Clifford would not fail Mary Seaton's husband. Now, listen! I require you to discharge Mademoiselle Annette, and to engage, as Beatrice's governess, *some one in whom you can place implicit confidence*; some one"—and again the General's voice sank to a whisper—"who is a God-fearing, sensible, unmistakable Protestant. Do you understand?"

"I do—*perfectly*."

"You understand my fears? You don't think me a suspicious, doting old fool?"

"If you are a fool on this head, so am I; I have long distrusted Mademoiselle. I feel convinced that she is not what she appears to be."

"Yet Fabian vouches for her from beginning to end. Of course I know that she is really a married woman—a widow, or else a deserted wife. Fabian told me her story before she entered the house. If the fellow left her I can't say I blame him unreservedly; she's a nice morsel for any man—for, mark me, Mrs. Clifford, as sure as you are your husband's wife, that woman—is—a—*Jesuit*."

"Why do you think so, General?"

"A hundred things make me think so. I have had my misgivings during the last few months, but now I feel tolerably certain Mademoiselle Annette is a female Jesuit, and she came into my family as a spy, a tool, a covert worker of dark, intriguing schemes. She is bringing up my darling to be a Papist—to be a nun perhaps! I see it all now; I really believe, as I lay here, speechless and motionless, God Himself showed it to me. You don't think I am crazy—wandering—in my dotage?"

"I do not, General; I have thought as you think for some time, and I have only waited for some ground whereon to rest the allegation to tell you, in confidence, what I so strongly suspected."

"Will you tell me how you came to entertain such suspicions?"

"I will, as far as I can. I doubted Mademoiselle's piety from the first, and with all her apparent zeal in the service of the English Church, I felt that she hated us and it. I never doubted her craft and duplicity, and yet I could bring no accusation against her. She did her duty, to all appearance, by the child. She watched over her health; she dressed her appropriately; she inculcated the most unexceptionable morals, and trained her as a little lady. Beatrice has charming manners, and scarcely a bad habit; and her French is perfect. Whatever Mrs. Annette is not, she is a *Parisienne*, and she has been in what we call 'good society.' She has taught Beatrice well;—I know something about teaching; I was brought up to it,

you know. If I had not married, I should have been a governess myself."

"She has taught the child, I fear, a good deal that needs to be untaught. I have heard the little one's innocent prattle often, without giving her my serious attention. Now, in my helplessness, I remember things which suggest more than I dare to contemplate. It is this stupid High Church that has blinded me. I, too, have been deceived,—old idiot that I was! They would never have made a Puseyite of my Mary. I let Beatrice be trained to Anglicanism, believing it to be a more excellent way; now it dawns upon me what Anglicanism really means. It is a weary and a toilsome road to Rome, you know, and English folk don't readily bend their minds to such a pilgrimage, and they have insular and national prejudices which must be dispelled. Now Anglicanism, though proposed as the goal of the earnest pilgrims, is truly the half-way house to Rome, the resting-place where English souls may abide, till they can plume their wings for a further flight, and set off hard and fast for the Vatican. They thought to lure me thither, did they? Ah, but I am too old a bird to be caught in their nets, and, please God, my dear child shall escape the deadly snare!"

"If Mademoiselle be a Jesuit—forgive me, General; I must say it—*what is Mr. Fabian?*"

The General groaned. "I wish you would tell me what he is," he replied. "Mrs. Clifford, I love that man; to love is to trust. I cannot bear to suspect John Fabian—nay! I will not suspect him. The Jesuits have made him their dupe; they are working upon him through his well-known Anglican proclivities. He is sound at heart, I am convinced of it. He would not deceive me, his friend—his father in all but blood. Nay, nay, it is he who is deceived."

"And I am firmly convinced in my own mind," said Mrs. Clifford, gravely, "that Mr. Fabian is no longer of our communion. It strikes me that he has been for some months at least, perhaps for a year or two, '*reconciled*'—I think that is the phrase—to what he invariably calls the *Elder Church*."

"But why conceal his convictions?"



"Has he concealed them?"

"Well, perhaps, not entirely. He has spoken very frankly to me, I must confess. Still, he has always, when brought to the point, distinctly disavowed any true sympathy or any relations with the Papal Church. I am a sound Churchman, as you know, and I rejoice to behold my Church asserting herself, and proclaiming her rights, in the face of those arrogant Dissenters, who dispute her just authority. And yet I am told that Dissent is on the increase."

"I think it is much stronger than it used to be, because Dissenters are now people of culture, and influence, and intellectual power. You see, they fought so long for mere toleration, and then for liberty, that they were naturally cramped and stifled in many directions. Having acquired not only toleration but full liberty, they now demand *equality*! And they will strive till they obtain it."

"Do you mean that?"

"I do. And I see no reason why they should not. For myself, I prefer the form and ritual of the Church of England as by law established, but I cannot see why she should be paramount over the sister Churches of the nation. Let every one be fully persuaded in his own mind."

"You astonish me—nay, you pain me, Mrs. Clifford!"

"I am sorry; but I thought I ought to speak plainly to you, and without reserve. I, at least, will not be a Jesuit."

"But you are a sound Churchwoman?"

"Not, I am afraid, in your sense of the word. I love my Church, and as long as she remains *Protestant* I shall be true to her; I shall thankfully remain in her communion. But, mark me, General, the day is coming when she will be Protestant no longer; it may not be in my time—I trust not; yet come it will, unless this great Rome-ward movement be successfully combated. It seems to me that in a few years Nonconformity will be the only reliable bulwark against the incursions of the enemy. The Church of England, as concerns true Protestantism, will be rotten to the core. Either she must cease to be our National Church, or our National Church must be the Church of Rome under an assumed name!"

"I fear me, you are right. Well! it will not much matter to me; I shall have mouldered in my grave ere that evil day arrive. But my child will still be living perhaps;—and speaking of her reminds me of how little time I have to spend on irrelevant discourse. You will at once seek the governess I spoke of?"

"I will, and I think I know where to find her. Shall I at once give Mademoiselle Annette formal notice?"

"As you please. I need not ask you to dismiss her with all courtesy. I think, if you first secured the lady you spoke of, and then intimated to Mademoiselle that she must retire in favour of a more efficient instructress, it might be the wiser course. But I leave it to you, and I trust you unreservedly. You have heard of some one likely to suit?"

"Yes; I met her two years ago, and I saw a great deal of her while I was staying at my cousin's house at Luncheon in the spring, during my recovery from the fever. But I must tell you, she is—at least by education—a Presbyterian."

"That does not matter, Presbyterians are Protestants,—and,—and,—*not* Dissenters, I should say!" With all his "sound Churchism," the General was slightly misty on certain ecclesiastical points.

"They dissent from the Established Church of England, decidedly; but Miss Armstrong has been in communion with our own Episcopal Church during the last five years. She is of good family—I know all about her relations; she is in her twenty-fifth year, very clever, well-read, charming, and beautiful; sweet-tempered, and as good as gold, and I shall be delighted to be of service to her."

"Engage her at once! Any salary you like! Two hundred a year would not be too much, if she would only bring up Beatrice as the Seatondale heiress should be brought up. Will Beattie take to her, I wonder?"

"She must take to her! I wish I could afford to have her for my girls. She is one of the most lovely and loveable creatures I ever encountered. And I'll tell you what, General, she might—I am told on the best authority—have made a splendid marriage, if she had consented to renounce

her Protestant principles. She loved the gentleman, poor girl, I believe—loved him dearly; but she would not, and could not, and *dare not*,—so she said—unite herself to a professed Roman Catholic.”

“Go and engage her to-morrow,” replied the General; “bring her here on any terms; use force, guile!—*kidnap* her, if necessary!”

## CHAPTER XXI.

### FATHER AND SON.

“Her arms across her breast she laid;  
 She was more fair than words can say;  
 Bare-footed came the beggar-maid  
 Before the King Cophetua.  
 In robe and crown the King stepped down  
 To meet and greet her on her way;  
 ‘It is no wonder,’ said the lords;  
 ‘She is more beautiful than day.’

\* \* \* \* \*

“So sweet a face, such angel grace,  
 In all that land had never been;  
 Cophetua swore a royal oath—  
 ‘This beggar-maid shall be my queen!’”

AND on the morrow, Mrs. Clifford, leaving her motherly little Agnes to take care of “papa” and to manage the little ones, set off for Luncheon in search of her promised *rara avis* of a governess; for the General had said at parting, with an imploring look she could not withstand—“May I ask you, as a great favour, to complete this business as speedily as possible? I particularly wish the thing to be quite settled before Mr. Fabian returns.”

“When does he return?” asked Mrs. Clifford, thinking how inconvenient it would be to leave her preserving just then.

“I cannot say; I have no idea. Fabian is always off on these Continental travels without any notice. A letter arrives from *somebody*, and he leaves Malham the same

day. He comes back as suddenly as he goes; even his own people do not know when to expect him. Sometimes he is absent for weeks, sometimes for a few days only. He is as erratic as a comet."

"I will do my best," replied Mrs. Clifford, thinking that she would rather arrange this little affair without Mr. Fabian's interference. So next morning, in the Seaton carriage, she travelled to Farleton, the nearest station, and thence by rail to Luncheon.

You will perhaps care to hear something of Edith Armstrong's life during the six years which have elapsed since Aubrey Seaton so unexpectedly made his appearance at Almira House. For three years Edith remained Mrs. Augustus Jevons's governess, and then, Louisa and Susan having left the schoolroom, she saw no reason why she should submit any longer to the bad temper and the untoward moods of her imperious patroness. It had been a weary three years; there had been excessive toil, unceasing demands on her resources, tiresome monotony, and an uncongenial atmosphere of home life. She had felt often very like an automaton, so stringent were the manifold rules imposed by Mrs. Jevons; every endeavour to strike out a new path, however promising, had been nipped in the bud, and but for the society of the two elder girls, Edith would certainly have rebelled or succumbed at a much earlier period.

Did Aubrey Seaton leave her in this dismal bondage all this time? you ask. Indeed, he did not. He was introduced to the Lady Euphrasia, and he and she were continually "thrown together" by those who were anxious that the acquaintance should terminate in marriage. But Lady Euphrasia was *dévotée*—a good girl, very nice-looking, if not absolutely handsome, moderately clever, sufficiently accomplished, docile by nature, and, if portionless, rich in pedigree and noble kindred. And Aubrey had said to himself, even before he saw Edith Armstrong, and before his faith in his religion was shaken, "I will never marry a convent-bred girl!"

It was not, therefore, surprising that the young man, after his visit to the North, should find little to charm him in the taciturn, thoroughbred Papist, Lady Euphrasia

Beaufort. Millicent liked her well enough, but she would have been more than annoyed had there seemed any probability of her becoming Aubrey's wife. She had little fear on this head, however, for Aubrey had told her all about his beautiful Edith, and at the same time had declared that were no Edith in existence, *nothing* could persuade him to marry a girl brought up by the Lady Abbess of St. Werburgh's! And Millicent grew so interested in Edith that on some slight pretence she wrote to her, and an intermittent sort of correspondence followed, religious subjects which touched however remotely on controversial points being for some time sedulously avoided.

Lady Euphrasia, chaperoned by a certain Mrs. Howard, came to Southerleigh a few weeks after the young heir's return. She pleased Mr. Seaton, for she seemed to enjoy sitting with him in his close, dull room, reading or talking in a low, clear, steady tone, which just suited his deadened hearing, and petting his invalid caprices. She even learnt to make gruel after his own private receipt, and did not object to share the questionable dainty at her host's request. And one day the old gentleman, who seemed in unusual spirits, said to his son, "A charming creature, Aubrey; a truly charming creature! Only a very superior woman could make that gruel, and she likes it, too, herself. Vance always would grate in just a *souçon* too much of nutmeg."

"It does not take a very superior woman to make gruel, does it, sir?" was Aubrey's rather irreverent answer. He wished his father plainly to understand that the Lady Euphrasia would find no wooer in him.

"I think it a great feather in a woman's cap, when she can make a good, *really good*, basin of gruel," replied Mr. Seaton. "In short, a woman like the Lady Euphrasia is a treasure. I wish I were your age, Aubrey!"

"I wish you were, sir, if it would conduce to your happiness. You might then marry our fair lady-cook."

"Perhaps I might; but as I cannot—being more than forty years the girl's senior—why should not you forthwith make her mistress of Southerleigh?"

"I, sir!" and Aubrey affected surprise.

"Yes, you!—who else, pray? I thought you understood

that on all hands this marriage was considered to be most eligible. Good blood, sweet-tempered, a pretty face,—yes! I call it a very pretty face—domestic tastes and devout religion! What more would you have, my son?”

“A vast deal more, father. Though I would be the last to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children, I do not count as good blood that which is simply derived from certain privileged sources. I should like my wife to be a gentlewoman, but I don't care a rap about *blue blood*, which is, after all, very seldom of the best quality. Then, as to sweet temper, *cela va sans dire!* But a temper may be *too* sweet, or so I fancy; if a woman have literally no will of her own, and no spirit, she must be tiresomely insipid. I must confess I like something a little more *piquante*. As for prettiness, I do not think my Lady Euphrasia boasts of much; she is very well; no one could call her plain, and Millie vows she is pretty, but I have seen girls with ten times more beauty. And I must tell you, sir, I have the Seaton weakness for beauty,—my mother, you know, was a beauty, and did ample credit, so I have heard, to your taste. I shall be content with nothing less than brilliant, unmistakable female loveliness, I assure you. Domestic tastes are well enough, but I really do not care about my wife knowing how to make gruel; I would prefer leaving that sort of thing to my cook, or to some other domestic. As to religion—well, an irreligious woman is an anomaly and a creature to be shunned; but a woman who makes her religion her *métier* is, to my mind, equally repulsive. My wife shall not be the tool of designing priests; I will not have her confessor always philandering about my lady's bower, and putting his meddling finger into every pie of mine! With us, to be religious, especially as regards women, is to be priest-ridden. No one knows that better than yourself, father.”

“I do know it,” said the old man, with an expressive gesture. “I feel like a released Sindbad, now that Father Fabian is fairly gone. Pray Heaven he stay on at Seaton-dale, and die there in the odour of sanctity. I have a great mind to give our Lady a necklace, or a bracelet, or a candlestick, or a rich vase, or something, as a thank-offer-

ing for his departure. What shall it be, Aubrey? It ought to be our joint gift."

"I think if I were you, father, I would not give our Lady—that is, her image—anything. It is too much like dressing a doll. Besides, it seems to me imputing to our Lady a vainglorious love of finery, which our best type of women would repudiate. Would it not be better to give a certain sum to the poor—our own poor? Let us see what a handsome necklace would cost, and then devise some means of spending the money in real charity. Surely that would please our Blessed Lady more than if we offered useless trinkets at her shrine. Don't you agree with me, sir?"

"Well, perhaps I do. I had not thought of it. Let us consult Father Eustace."

"With all my heart. He will be sure to decide for the poor. If anybody must have a necklace let it be Millicent; so many of our mother's jewels went with my elder sisters to their convents, that Millie is really short of ornaments."

"We will talk about that another day. But now, Aubrey, about the Lady Euphrasia?"

"I have every respect for her, sir; to a certain extent I admire her; but I do not love her, and I never shall, and I will not shackle myself with an unloved wife. I may as well say at once that I could never feel any true affection for a convent-bred, priest-ridden woman, like my Lady Euphrasia."

"Yet you must marry, my son! The Southerleigh Seatons must not die out. Let me hold a child of yours in my arms, and I shall die happy. Yes, yes, you *must* marry."

"Doubtless. I have no vocation for celibacy; I shall marry if I can."

"If you can! Any man may marry if he will; the women, poor souls, must hold their tongues, whatever be their aspirations. Aubrey! tell me truth—have you not seen some one in the North who has stolen away your heart?"

After a little hesitation Aubrey answered briefly in the affirmative.

"And of course she is your betrothed?" said Mr.

Seaton, looking much disturbed. "You might have been more open with me, Aubrey; I have never played the despot with you. But I suppose Father Fabian's pupil could scarcely avoid somewhat of a tortuous policy."

"You do me wrong, father. There is nothing yet to be open about. I did see a young lady at Lunechester, who made upon me an impression which, I feel certain, nothing can ever efface. But that is all; the girl has no idea of my attachment, nor can I dare to suppose that she would reciprocate it if she did. She may be engaged, for anything I know to the contrary."

"Pardon me, my dear son; but this is a mere boyish entanglement of the fancy. If you loved this girl, and if she was worthy of a Seaton's love—and I am positive you would not love one who was in any way unworthy—why did you not speak?"

"She is worthy, sir, I am confident. For her goodness I could vouch; her manner and bearing testify to her birth and breeding. Her beauty is past dispute. I never saw a living face half so lovely! But there was one barrier. I think I should have risked all, and on that mere passing knowledge of her have declared myself, had she been of our own faith."

"You don't mean to tell me that you—you, my son, trained at St. Omer, and Father Fabian's cherished pupil—have fallen in love with a *heretic*?"

"I fell in love, as you say, the first moment I saw her face. I saw she was pure, and good, and high-minded; I did not think what her creed might be, though I found it out very soon. I had scarcely exchanged five sentences with her before I knew she was not a Catholic."

"My dear son, put this snare away from you, I entreat. You must not wed a heretic!"

"Certainly not; but might she not be won over to the true faith? Conversions are the order of the day, you know, and our faith is the only true one, in spite of the error with which it is overcast. I am still a true Catholic, father, though I cast from me much that priestly craft and ambition have imposed. I am no Jesuit. I detest Jesuitism."

"Well, if the girl is really worthy of being the mother



of the next generation of Seatons, set about converting her with all possible despatch. Surely the Jesuit fathers taught you enough theology for the refutation of a pretty girl's shallow arguments! Why, I should like to try my hand at converting her myself. Old as I am, and invalided as I am, I can still worship at beauty's shrine, and though my own love-making has long been past and over, I should rather enjoy doing a little courting on your behalf, my boy. I will read up a controversial work or two; and since you won't wed poor Euphra—I must confess she has a little too much of the cloister in her tone and conversation—let us have your fair flame here, and if Millie and I and *you*, her ardent lover, cannot convert her, either we must be a set of muffs, or she is as obstinate as a mule. What did you say about the girl being possibly engaged? Of course, if she is engaged, your fate is sealed; for I take it you are not the man to go poaching on another fellow's preserves."

"Decidedly not. But I feel sure she is free, heart-free and hand-free, both. Her position bespeaks her freedom: if she had a lover, an affianced husband, she would not be situated as she is."

"And how is she situated?"

"She is a governess in a wealthy manufacturer's family."

"*A governess!* My son marry a governess! a nursemaid! a paid dependent! No, no, Aubrey. I will never consent to a *mésalliance*. There has never been one in our branch of the family. Your uncle's marriage with Miss Damarel was not quite the thing; but though she was poor and a nobody in many ways, she really was a gentlewoman."

"And Miss Armstrong is a gentlewoman; she is as much a lady as Millicent."

"Don't tell me; a nursemaid cannot be a lady."

"But Miss Armstrong is a *governess*."

"Nursemaid or governess, what does it matter, sir? Milliner or dressmaker, what do I care? I don't despise such people, God forbid! but let them marry in their own sphere, and with their own kind. Hawks don't mate with sparrows, nor eagles with tomtits and young wrens.

And Seatons of Southerleigh don't wed with low-born tradeswomen ! ”

“ Father, may not a woman be a lady, and yet a hired dependent ? A gentlewoman may be left orphaned and unprovided for, may she not ? Is she any the worse that she works with her hands or her brains, or with both, to maintain herself honestly and decently ? Women must eat, drink, and be clothed, and live under shelter, whether they be born in the purple or in a garret. Why should a woman lose *caste* because, perforce, she must earn her daily bread ? Of course, there are governesses and governesses, and dress-makers and dressmakers, &c., &c. ; but I would have staked my entire future on Edith Armstrong's *ladyhood*—I don't know whether there is such a word—if I had found her a housemaid or a half-starved sempstress ! Why, sir, you have told me again and again how you once met with an old friend of yours—a marquis of the ancient *noblesse*—working for his living as a *perruquier*, or something of the sort ! ”

“ That was the fruit of a wicked revolution ! That was quite another affair. A revolution excuses much that would otherwise be inexcusable.”

“ Of course ! But there are revolutions in families as well as in States. And I honour the women who nobly go out into the world to labour and to strive, rather than eat the bitter bread of charity, or sink helplessly into the mire of destitution ! ”

“ And so do I. No one can say that I, Francis Seaton, do not appreciate honest worth. I would lend a helping hand to any such woman, so striving and so enduring, but I would not, if it were a question of marriage, make her my wife. I would not acknowledge her as my daughter.”

“ But if I prove to you that Edith Armstrong is truly a lady, you will not refuse to acknowledge her simply because adverse fortune has compelled her to go out governing ? She has never been out before, she told me so.”

“ I dare say ! A pretty woman generally knows how to tell her own tale to a handsome young gallant. No ! if the governess-ship be an accident, a misfortune, not a profes-

sion, I don't say that I shall be obdurate. Still, I shall require most incontestible proofs."

"The young lady herself would be the best proof, sir. She would grace a coronet. Have I, then, your permission to find out all about her?"

"Certainly; only do be guarded: do not commit yourself by as much as a tone or a glance! An honourable man cannot play fast and loose with a woman, whatever be her station. Be quite sure of all your premises before you take a single step. Arm yourself against imposition, and remember—though I don't want to make you conceited, young sir—that you are what the world esteems a very eligible *parti*."

"Miss Armstrong does not know who I am. She did not know my name till the other day, and that would not tell her much; there are Seatons and Seatons, you know, sir, and some of them are not eldest sons, or heirs to good estates."

"Well, it seems to me you had better give up your fine romance! You have not compromised yourself, and there are so many lions in the way. First, you must find out all about the girl, without her suspecting what you are after; and then you must convert her to the true faith. A governess, and a heretic! *ma foi*, Aubrey, it is not encouraging. Is she a Border woman? Armstrongs and Eliots favour that locality, I believe."

"I fancy she is Scotch. She was coming from Glasgow when I met her."

"Worse and worse! Then she will have high cheek-bones, strong jaws, and a square chin."

"Scotch or English, she is as beautiful as the day; as you will confess, sir, when you permit me to introduce her to Millicent."

"Well, well, do as you please. Only remember, I never will receive a half-bred, middle-class beauty, or a *heretic*, as my daughter-in-law. So be off with you, infatuated King Cophetua, and prove, *if you can*, your beggar-maid's sixteen quarterings."

## CHAPTER XXII.

## AUBREY SECURES A FRIEND.

"It is not good for man to be alone!  
His greater heart of ruder texture spun,  
In its own desolate strength does fret and moan,  
Till it has softness won.

"And softness is the stronger strength which casts  
On strength its charm, and these together blent,  
Become that force which moves against the blast  
Of life omnipotent."

"SHALL I write to her, or shall I go and plead my cause in person?" asked Aubrey, first of himself and then of his sister Millicent, as they paced the garden terraces together.

"That you must decide for yourself," replied Miss Seaton. "Love must be his own best counsellor, I should say, though I am scarcely competent to give an opinion, because, as you know, I never was the least bit in love in my life."

"All in good time, Millie, dear; you are not twenty yet."

"You have found out all you wanted to know concerning Miss Armstrong's family?"

"All my father wished to know! I, for my part, was quite willing to take her upon trust. I don't care twopence about pedigrees and quarterings. Still, I am glad that she is of gentle blood, and well connected—as stupid people say; that fact smooths away one of the difficulties in my path. I wish the other may as easily be dealt with."

"Her conversion, you mean! Ah! that is another matter. I do not know—nor do you, either—what sort of stuff this girl is made of; but, if she is worth anything, she will not carelessly, or only for love's sake, surrender the faith in which she has been educated."

"I have been thinking it over, and I do not see why

difference of creed should be an insuperable obstacle. I am not a bigoted Catholic; far from it, as no one knows so well as yourself, Millie. We might each concede something, and if we do marry and have children, the boys might be brought up in my religion, and the girls in hers. If she is High Church it cannot much matter; there is not so wide a separation between Roman and Anglo-Catholic as at first sight would appear; and what at present divides us will probably melt away as time advances. Father Eustace thinks the union or fusion of the two Churches certain. And then there will be no more controversy, and quarrels and schisms will for ever cease."

"Father Eustace is a dear old man, and I love him; but he is counting on a speedy Millennium which will never arrive. He was talking to me in his dreamy, Utopian style only last evening, and I flatly told him he was wrong. 'The Church of England is well inoculated,' said he; 'she will approximate more and more to the true faith, and at last there will be a great stir, a mighty gathering in, and the work will be accomplished.'"

"And you did not agree with him?"

"No; and for obvious reasons. The Church of England is the National Church only in name. She may boast and bully, and proclaim on the house-tops her increasing power and strength; but in her heart of hearts she must know—she must at least suspect, the true state of the case."

"And that is ——?"

"That she has lost her hold on the people, and that she will lose it still more and more, as she Romanises her ritual and her belief. A section of the so-called English Church will, doubtless, become Catholic actually, if not nominally; and a pretty large section, too. But what then?—the nation won't bear it; the Evangelicals, I fancy, will go as far as they dare, and even stand 'shivering on the brink,' perhaps, but the mass of them will remain true to Protestantism. As for Nonconformity, it is a mighty bulwark, it will hold its own, and, in so doing, it will save the country."

"Save it? Don't you mean *destroy* it, Millie?"

"No, I do not. I don't want to see my glorious England

under the thumb of the Pontiff, who can scarcely hold his own at home."

"How in the world do you come to such conclusions? What can you know about rival creeds and churches, and their diverse claims?"

"*I read the newspapers!* I could not do it while Father Fabian was here, for he forbade all papers save the *Tablet*; but now, as Father Eustace does not interfere with my literary pursuits, I go in for a good deal of outspoken journalism; and that my mind may grow broader, and my intelligence fuller, I read all sorts. Papa has the *Times* now, as you are aware, and one learns a heap from its leading articles. You must have found out a few things from its columns yourself I should think—you study them pretty closely. Then I have a Liberal paper and a Conservative paper, and I weigh them one against another. I have the *Record* once a week. I can't swallow it oftener, it disagrees with my mental constitution, denouncing Romanism, or Popery, as it delights to call Catholicism, on the one hand, while it pommels away at Dissenters with the other; though I don't suppose anybody cares much for its onslaughts and fulminations. When I read the *Record*, I always think of the man who allowed his wife to beat him, because, as he explained to his neighbours, who, like the rest of the world, didn't mind their own business, 'it don't hurt me, and it amuses her.' Of course, I read the opposite papers, the High-Church organ—I forget its name at this moment—and I take in the *Patriot*, and one or two more Dissenting periodicals, and I know all about Mr. Miall's Anti-State-Church agitation."

"Upon my word, Millie, you are a most wonderful young woman! But you will get into hot water, my dear, if you don't take care."

"Never mind! Better boil over now and then than simmer everlastingly! Better an occasional storm than dead stagnation. I hate a tideless sea! My heart has beat more healthily, and my blood has circulated more freely, since I took to studying politics and discussing rival creeds."

"And where will it all end, Millie?"

"Don't speak in that reproachful tone, Aubrey; I don't know yet where it will end! I am in a transition state; a thousand new ideas are struggling together in my mind; but be sure of this, I shall do nothing rashly, and while my father lives I would rather not, if it be possible, make any demonstration of my views. While he lives, I shall probably remain a Catholic, though a lax one. What a mercy that Father Eustace takes everything for granted, and lets me off so easily!"

"The Blessed Virgin and the Saints guide you, Millie! you tread a perilous path. I am sadly heretical myself, so many strange thoughts have pressed upon me lately; but I am still a staunch Catholic. I still believe our Church to be the true Church. I only ask for liberty of conscience and general toleration."

"Which, in the bosom of Rome, you will never obtain. No! nor within the pale of the Anglican State-Church, where priestcraft reigns and grows. But, Aubrey, dear, this I must say—I do not believe that the Saints or the Virgin *can* help me, but God can and will. It is to my Father in heaven I appeal, and I ask the aid and guidance of His Spirit. I read the other day, in the New Testament, 'And this is life eternal to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.' This is the knowledge I seek, and that I strive after. But God Himself must be my teacher, and I will have none other, for in none other can I have confidence."

"I am afraid, Millie, you will not undertake, as my father proposes, the conversion of Edith Armstrong."

"Would it be wise? She might convert me, you know! But *apropos* of Edith, let us return to our original subject. Though I declined at first to advise you, I think—yes, I think it would be best that you should see her, and tell her frankly all that is in your heart."

"So be it, then. I will go to Lunechester early next week, if my father can spare me."

"Shall you visit Seatondale?"

"No; because I must either denounce Father Fabian, or make myself a party to the fraud by which he imposes himself on General Seaton. The first alternative I would escape, if possible; there is my fatal oath of obedience!"

The latter is not to be thought of; I will never again see my uncle's face, if I can help it, till I stand before him with truth on my lips as in my heart."

"Your oath of obedience! He tried to impose that on me also, but I rebelled, vowing in a girlish, pettish way that I hated obedience, and loved my own sweet will. If he had remained, I dare say he would have obtained what he sought; happily for me, just as we approached extremities, your letter from Seatondale arrived, and the Father found that he had far other fish to fry—fish which could not be kept waiting in the pan. Fish of magnitude, too! Of course he at once abandoned a minnow like me, when there was a whale to be caught in Seatondale. The holy fathers are very worldly-wise, Aubrey. As for your oath, I had rather say nothing about it, because I feel my mind is all in a confusion respecting it. In getting out of the ruts of priestcraft and prescription, I hope I shall not run off the rails into wildest error. I see there is danger. Only—do you not think you are keeping your oath more in the letter than in the spirit? Would Father Fabian sanction your addresses to a heretic?"

"I shall never ask him. He knows nothing about Edith—must not know, or he will at once devise some mischief against her. I only vowed to obey him where the interests of the Church are concerned. I shall certainly choose my own wife, without any reference to him."

"I am very sure he intended your entire subjection; he never meant you to marry without his fullest consent."

"I did not intend it, nor do I now. I am an Englishman, and I will be free. Alas, alas! Millie, I am not free, or I should at once warn my uncle of what may befall him."

It was, however, several weeks before Aubrey could leave home; he had to transact business for his father, and to run up twice to London before certain legal affairs could be settled, so that September was well advanced when at last he found himself again on the platform of the Lunechester station. He had heard through Father Eustace that Mr. Fabian was in Belgium, a piece of news which greatly relieved his mind, for he had dreaded nothing more than a chance encounter with his late preceptor;



so taking his absence as a good omen, he made the journey in most buoyant spirits. Once more he trod the quaint streets of the old-fashioned northern town, and once more in the warm autumnal afternoon he toiled up the steep, dusty Burnthorp Road, till he saw the swelling purple moors in the distance and the dark fells beyond, and close at hand the square, substantial mansion, yclept "Almira House." His heart almost failed him as he swung open the wide gate; the scarlet geraniums seemed staring him out of countenance, the snow-white steps to reproach him as an impudent intruder; the very hall door, which was massive and painted of a dark invisible green, looked as formidable as a guarded portcullis. He wished now that he had written a few lines to explain his visit. But then, he thought she might have taken sudden alarm, and refused to see him, so perhaps all was for the best.

Now, if you remember, when Aubrey called before at Almira House, Mrs. Jevons was not at home, and Louise had straightway conveyed his card to the lady to whom he paid his visit. On this occasion Mrs. Jevons was making up her Pastoral Aid accounts ready for the quarterly meeting, and, as she looked up, wondering what a hundred and seventy-three pence came to, "she was 'ware," as say the ancient chronicles, of a goodly, well-dressed young gentleman coming up the drive. He did not look in the least like a curate, nor could he be a genteel beggar, nor one of those objectionable persons who go from house to house worrying for subscriptions to some forthcoming work in monthly numbers, for he carried nothing in his hand but a very neat ivory-handled silk umbrella. Mrs. Jevons decided that he was a veritable gentleman, and she regretted that she had not put on a handsomer dress, and that her hands were rather inky. As the servant came into the hall, she opened the drawing-room door about half an inch, and silently pointed to the dining-room door, and then she inclined her ear to listen to what should pass upon the threshold.

"Is Miss Armstrong at home?" said a musical male voice, very suavely.

"Miss Armstrong is in the house, I believe, sir," replied the prudent parlour-maid, who knew that her mistress was

within earshot, "but I cannot say whether she is disengaged."

"I can wait Miss Armstrong's convenience," returned the voice; "be good enough to give her my card immediately."

Then the hall-door was closed, and the stranger shown into the dining-room, where, it is to be hoped, he improved his leisure by reading Newton's "Cardiphonia," which lay open on the table, where Mrs. Jevons had left it, after culling from it a few choice ideas which might be interpolated with her own, in a letter to the secretary of some parent society in London. Mrs. Jevons's letters were always such as might be read on committee, if not at public meetings.

Without a word, she took the card from the servant's hand, and went upstairs; not, as you may imagine, to summon Edith to the dining-room, but to make some alterations in her own toilet. She washed her hands, pulled out her glossy curls, changed her collar and bow, and put on her best cap; and then, after reading Aubrey's name over once or twice, went down again, determined to give him an audience on her own account; "for," as she whispered to herself, "I really must look after this girl. The young man has been here before; I cannot and will not have any courting here. Governesses, like servants—in fact, they *are* servants—cannot be allowed followers. It is impossible that a governess should do her duty by her pupils if her head is full of beaux and nonsense, to say nothing of the bad example to the children. This comes of having such a pretty governess. I never was bothered with young men in Miss Stenyon's time."

And as poor Miss Stenyon was short and fat, thick-lipped and snub-nosed, with the complexion of an over-boiled suet dumpling and a temper which imparted no sweetness to her irregular features, the absence of admirers rather naturally followed. Strong in her determination to deal very plainly with this presumptuous youth who dared to come courting one of her dependants, she entered the room, drawn up to her full height of five feet six inches, with her most imposing air, the very *beau idéal* of a virtuous British matron.

But Aubrey Seaton was too clever for Mrs. Augustus

Jevons. The moment the lady presented herself he perceived how the land lay, and framed his behaviour accordingly. He bowed low to the mistress of Almira House with a grace which she secretly admired, while the dignity of his manner, and what she called "his aristocratic bearing," strongly impressed her. For a moment both were silent, as, in response to the courtly bow, Mrs. Jevons had to make a courtly curtesy, such as she had seen "dear" Lady Sophia make on particular occasions. Aubrey took the initiative. "Mrs. Jevons, I presume?" he questioned with much self-possession. He felt quite composed in the presence of this fine middle-aged lady; he would scarcely have found courage to speak a word had it been Edith herself who stood before him. Mrs. Jevons inclined her head, and read aloud from Aubrey's card, "Mr. Aubrey Seaton, of Southerleigh." And then she took up her parable—"And you wish to see the young person who is at present my governess? She can scarcely leave the schoolroom at this hour, I am afraid."

"I should be very sorry to interfere with your arrangements," replied Aubrey, most politely, "and, indeed, it will perhaps be better that I should speak first to you on the business which has brought me here. If I might but hope to enlist your sympathy—if I might venture to ask your advice——" And here Aubrey stopped, scarcely knowing how to proceed.

But Mrs. Jevons highly approved of his behaviour. This was something like—taking her into his confidence at the outset, and she interpreted his hesitation as modesty. Modesty and humility were the virtues which Mrs. Jevons most highly esteemed—in others. She seemed to have got a sort of dispensation from these, and from several other Christian graces, on her own account.

"I shall be very happy," she answered graciously. "If my poor judgment can be of any avail, it is at your service."

"Thank you, *much*. As Miss Armstrong's friend and patroness, it is only right that I should, in the first instance, address myself to you, madam. She has, I am informed, no parents and no near relatives."

"Oh, Aubrey Seaton, you were not trained by the Jesuit Fathers for nothing !

"Miss Armstrong is an orphan, and as nearly friendless as can be. Lady Sophia Saville, a sweet Christian woman, and author of several beautiful little Gospel tracts, at whose request I received this young person into my family, is rather a connection than a relative. I think I understand that you made the acquaintance of my governess on the day of her arrival here—during the journey, in fact?"

"Exactly. There was an accident, happily not a serious one. But for that disaster we might have parted without a word."

"Would it not have been better had it been so? I will speak freely. The notice of a young gentleman like yourself can scarcely benefit a girl in Miss Armstrong's position. The world is so ready to talk. Ah, it is a sad world, Mr. Seaton!"

"But the world cannot talk injuriously, though it may prattle a little, if I have your permission to see Miss Armstrong in your house, to visit her with your express sanction. I propose nothing clandestine. I would not for worlds expose the woman I love to the smallest misconception."

"You do not mean that you wish to *marry* Miss Armstrong?" And Mrs. Jevons sat bolt upright and opened her mouth in amazement. Aubrey looked displeased.

"You surely cannot suppose that I seek a young lady as I am seeking Miss Armstrong, with any other object? You surely do not imagine that I intended to occupy myself with a mere flirtation? My appeal to you would be simply insulting had I any but the most honourable views with regard to Miss Armstrong."

"But what do you know of her, and what does she know of you?" faltered Mrs. Jevons.

"I know but little of her, and what I do know fills me with admiration and respect. She knows little of me. I wish to converse with her, to correspond with her. My sister Millicent and she have exchanged several letters. I wish to become intimate with her, hoping that such intimacy may lead to an engagement after no long period. And I come with my father's sanction."

"Who is your father, sir? Not General Seaton of

Seatondale, I imagine? Oh, no, he has no son; I know, and his nephew is his heir."

"And I am that nephew, though no longer his heir. He is now blessed with a little daughter, and the Seaton estates go in the female line. I am still my father's heir, of course, for I am his only surviving son, and he is Seaton of Southerleigh."

Now, Mrs. Jevons, though on certain terms with Lady Sophia Saville, was quite out of the pale of county society; and Seatondale and Chalfonts, and all that beautiful wild country which lies to the south of the Lake district, was, to such as she, an unexplored region. She had never heard of the Popish heir, or if she had, she had forgotten all about it. General Seaton had once sent a handsome subscription to some society with which she was connected, and she had seen his name figuring well in subscription lists; it never occurred to her that a nephew of his could be anything else than essentially Protestant.

She began to think how much reflected honour and glory must fall upon herself, if she had the arranging of such a match. She had a strong hankering after "county society," though she felt in her heart how foolish and worldly were her desires; yet as the intimate friend of the Seatons, her admission to the magic circle would follow as a matter of course, and it was a Christian duty to make the best of one's opportunities, and an ampler sphere of society meant always a wider field of usefulness. A little more conversation, and she resolved on taking up the affair *con amore*. She would smile upon the lovers, she would aid and abet them in all their little schemes, she herself would superintend the wedding outfit, and Edith should be married from Almira House! Of course Louise and Susan must be bridesmaids, and after that, she and her daughters must naturally have the *entrée* of Seaton Hall and of Southerleigh.

So Aubrey was cordially invited to take tea and spend the evening, and tea was ordered in the morning room, in order that the young people might have their talk afterwards undisturbed. And Aubrey was in a seventh heaven of rapture, and overflowing with gratitude to the most estimable matron in the world—to wit, Mrs. Augustus Jevons.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## A STRANGE WOOING.

"The saints on earth, and those above,  
But one communion make;  
Join'd to their Lord in bonds of love,  
All of His grace partake.

"One family, we dwell in Him;  
One Church, above, beneath;  
Though now divided by the stream—  
The narrow stream—of death."

MRS. JEVONS ascended to the schoolroom where Edith, all unconscious of her brilliant prospects, was reading French with Louisa and Susan, and wishing the day's duties were fairly over, and a night's rest legitimately obtained, for the young governess was unutterably weary of the monotonous toil of teaching. "Governessing" was certainly not Edith Armstrong's vocation, though she loved literature, and music and painting, and had a perfect passion for languages. To a person with such tastes, the teaching of rudiments is nearly always drudgery. She could interpret Mendelssohn truly, but Kalkbrenner's Scales and Czerny's Exercises were an infliction; she delighted in Racine and Corneille, but she was tired of the very sight of *Levizac*; her favourite painter was Claude, but she sickened over the sepia daubs, which were all that her pupils succeeded in perpetrating; and while she devoured Macaulay, she hated the presence of Goldsmith's and Mrs. Markham's Histories.

It was an inexpressible relief to behold Mrs. Jevons come in, with a face that showed that some kind of change in the set programme of Wednesday afternoons was certainly impending. Languidly, however, Edith looked up from Susan's *Telemaque*, for she never for a moment imagined she could be personally interested in the diversion which was about to take place; she only supposed the elder girls were suddenly wanted in the drawing-room,

or that their mamma had just remembered some special meeting to take place that evening in one of the outlying villages.

Great, therefore, was her surprise, when Mrs. Jevons, in an excited, but most gracious tone, addressed her. "Miss Armstrong, my dear, will you kindly remit the conclusion of to-day's lessons? Children, you can sit still, and prepare to-morrow's exercises till the schoolroom-tea is ready; I want to speak to Miss Armstrong. Come to my room, Edith."

Wondering, yet fortified by Mrs. Jevons's condescension, Edith obeyed; she had never been called "Edith" in that house before. "My dear, I have great news for you," began the lady, as the bedroom door was closed; "I have a visitor for you downstairs. Make haste and put on your prettiest dress—your new muslin with the blue ribbons will do nicely; your hair is in beautiful order; I will find you a rose to twist into the behind plaits."

Edith could only stare, and hope that her patroness was not "*fey*," as the Scotch and Border folk express themselves, when they think a person is marked for death. She had been reproved on account of those very blue ribbons, as having a frivolous and worldly appearance; as for wearing a flower in her hair at Almira House, she would as soon have thought of donning the decorations of a stage empress. Mrs. Jevons hastened to exclaim, "Mr. Aubrey Seaton is here! What blushes! Ah! you sly girl, you know what he comes for!"

"I really do *not* know," replied Edith, trying to speak calmly. "Did he ask for me?"

"Of course he did! He and I have had a long conversation. He is a most excellent young man, I am persuaded, though I should not like to say *certainly* that he is a converted character. Still, I think he has the root of the matter in him, and as you are not converted, but only piously inclined yourself, it will suit very well. Only remember, my dear, that to be almost persuaded is not to be a Christian."

"Certainly, not," returned Edith, more mystified than ever; "but I do not understand——"

"Never mind, my love; Mr. Seaton will instruct you

himself. He visits you with my entire sanction, you know, and I hope everything will be satisfactorily arranged. You may count upon my good offices. I have ordered tea—high tea, of course, in the morning-room; I will preside, that you may be more at your ease; afterwards I will leave you together. I will not be—what is it the French say?—*de trop* on such an interesting occasion.”

Edith could not but comprehend, though she could not believe her own ears. It was only that very morning she had scolded herself severely for thinking so often about Aubrey Seaton, who could not possibly be thinking about her, and who had no doubt paid that one visit as a mere piece of gentlemanly courtesy. And here he was again, not only calling, but permitted to remain as an honoured visitor. Mrs. Jevons would not have ordered “high tea” for any one whom she did not wish to propitiate, as Edith well knew. She only extended such favours in general to her pet parsons, to deputations from parent societies, and to the select few whom she considered worthy. She made her toilet like a person in a dream, feeling the strange unreality of things more and more, when Mrs. Jevons came back with a lovely cluster of tea-roses for her hair, at the same time pinching into place a slightly crushed blue bow.

Mrs. Jevons would have sent Edith into the morning-room alone; but the girl, overpowered by her maidenly shame-fastness, clung to her and begged her to remain; for, as she pleaded, Mr. Seaton, whatever he came for, was quite a stranger to her. So Mrs. Jevons, well pleased to be chaperone for the nonce, slid Edith’s trembling hand under her arm, and entered with her as if they had been mother and daughter. Notwithstanding her confusion, Edith looked wonderfully beautiful, and Aubrey was delighted. So far, his affairs progressed charmingly. He had won the matron’s heart, won it completely, and “at a canter;” if only he might succeed equally well with this fair, sweet woman, who had so inexplicably become all the world to him!

As good as her word, Mrs. Jevons contrived to be called away as soon as the tea-things were removed, though Edith looked imploringly as she left the room. She was



no coquette; but under the circumstances she was naturally timid. There was something so very abrupt, so terribly matter-of-fact, in this her first lover's wooing. Mrs. Jevons fairly disposed of, however, affairs assumed a very different aspect: the singularity of their position was forgotten, and the young people came to a quick understanding of each other's feelings. Aubrey poured out all his story of love, declaring that it dated from the moment of his entering the railway-carriage at Farleton. Edith admitted that she had felt more than common interest in her travelling companion, and that she had always remembered with great pleasure his kind attentions. "For I was so sad and solitary!" she said, timidly. "I felt quite alone in the wide world. I had that morning left those who had given me at least the semblance of a home for several months; my real old home I had lost a full year before. I was going among strangers — strangers, too, whom for certain reasons I distrusted. It is a terrible feeling, that utter loneliness."

"You shall never be lonely again, dearest. There will henceforth be one heart always beating in unison with your own. It is all settled, is it not?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Seaton; we know so very little of each other; I should not like to enter into any engagement just yet. And what will your father say?"

"My father will let me please myself; when he sees you, he will be more than satisfied. He knew why I came here, and he did not even wish to detain me."

"Does he know that I am only a governess?"

"He does; my father and I are always quite frank with each other."

"And you are sure he does not object?"

"He does not object to Edith. He is not so weak as to suppose that you have lost *caste*, because for a few months adverse circumstances threw you on your own resources. As for myself, I honour you, as a brave and self-reliant woman; I could never love one of those animated wax-doll creatures, who can no more stand alone than the infant of a day. I should not care for a plaything in my wife; one gets tired of the prettiest playthings, you know, and when they cease to amuse they are sure to be thrown

aside. I want a companion, a help-meet, a sensible, loving woman, who will not only be bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh, but soul of my soul. There must be interchange of thought as well as of affection, to make a perfect marriage."

And as Aubrey spoke, he remembered the barrier between them, which up to that moment, in the overflow of his happiness, he had forgotten. So far, all had gone well and smoothly; due inquiries had been made, which ended in the most satisfactory way. Edith was a gentlewoman by birth and by descent, as well as by force of nature and education, and people, though just now they ignored her as a poor relation, were not such as even a Southerleigh Seaton need be ashamed of. On that score, Francis Seaton had no further objection to make, so that Aubrey, when "he would a-wooing go," went with his father's sanction—*only under conditions!* He might wed one of the Armstrongs of Elderslie Tower,—a fine old Border family. It is true the Armstrongs had once been freebooters and outlaws, but that was a good while ago, and the Seatons themselves had done a little "moss-trooping" and "lifting" in the good old times, when people of rank, even, had very inadequate notions of *meum* and *tuum*! Indeed, if it comes to that, I suppose most of the good old families of England, Scotland, and France have the blood of robbers in their veins—robbing on a grand scale, with four or six score followers at heel, being rather a gentlemanly diversion than otherwise, and a legitimate occupation, provided it were done openly, successfully, and with sufficient *éclat*. Even King David, the son of Jesse, must have been a terrible marauder in those days, *before* he ascended the throne of Israel!

But though Aubrey might wed an Armstrong, he might not wed a *heretic*! He had even declared that he would not do this thing, though the more he considered it, the more he was inclined to pronounce the question of creed of very minor importance. He was no bigot,—he was a "liberal Catholic,"—or, rather, a lax one, for he did not and would not believe in the everlasting damnation of Protestants, whom he doubted not would be judged according to their works, as would be those of his own

communion. And he felt certain that Edith was no bigot either. Why not, then, compromise matters? Why should either be called to any sacrifice of convictions? Why should not he go to the Mass, and his wife to the orthodox parish church? And if their union were blessed with offspring—of course the boys must be reared in the ancient faith, while the girls could profess that of their mother.

For in those days the Church of Rome had not forbidden these mixed marriages. Indeed, it does not, I believe, actually forbid them now—perhaps because it cannot in this free English land of ours. But it does forbid a Roman Catholic to rear children in the Protestant faith. If Rome and Geneva will ally themselves—well, they must! but Rome's offspring must be baptized and educated in Rome's own bosom. Of course, this is not *law*—only canon law; but then to a true Romanist the decrees of his Church are as binding—perhaps a good deal more so—than the Decalogue, and less to be resisted than a good many Acts of Parliament. For Rome knows what she is about; she is wise as the serpent, though, alas! not as harmless as the dove; and, therefore, she keeps her children in leading strings all the days of their life, and never intermits the obligations of her slaves, nor slackens the chains which bind them to her altars.

"There is only one thing more," commenced Aubrey, his voice shaking a little as he spoke, for this was the "one thing" on which, as he believed, his life's happiness depended. The young man was gifted with very clear perceptions—so clear, and so instantaneous they were, that they amounted *almost* to intuition; yet he had not quite that marvellous sixth sense, which only those who possess, accredit. He divined rather than perceived that Edith's sweetness and gentleness covered a great deal of plain good sense and sound judgment, as well as a tolerable amount of firmness and decision. "One thing more," he repeated, "about which I do not greatly concern myself, but which, nevertheless, must not be forgotten. It is—I was going to say, the question of *religion*—rather, it is the question of mere profession. The love of God, I hope, is in my heart; I wish, before all things, to serve Him

and do Him honour; that your feeling is the same I cannot doubt; and yet—I think—I feel sure we are of diverse, though not, I hope, of antagonistic creeds. I am—a *Catholic!*”

Edith became very pale, and for nearly a minute she kept silence. Aubrey flattered himself that “silence meant consent.” He was about to draw her towards him in a closer embrace; he wanted to press the kiss of betrothal on her lips; but she held back, and when he looked into the dear face, it was sweet and pure as before, but no longer calm, and the lovely rosy hues had passed from lip and cheek.

“Edith!” he exclaimed, feeling as if his doom were sealed, “you will not make that a hindrance—a real hindrance?”

“You mean that you are what I should call a *Roman Catholic?*” she asked under her breath.

“Yes; a Roman Catholic, if you will. We Southerleigh Seatons have always been of the old religion. And you —?”

“I am a Protestant—*Dissenter!*”

“A *Dissenter!* Impossible, Edith, Edith! You a Dissenter?—it cannot be!”

“Why not? I was bred a Presbyterian, and Presbyterianism is Dissent—at least, in England.”

“But I thought you attended *church*, as people say?”

“And so I do, because Mrs. Jevons will not have it otherwise. I do not quite like it; the more I have to do with Episcopacy, the more fault I find with it. But in the church which we attend there is nothing to which a Christian person need object. It is what has come to be called ‘*Low Church*,’ and I can worship in peace and charity with its members, many of whom I know to be truly good and holy people, seeking to glorify God in their lives here, and waiting in hope for that better life which is beyond the grave. In some of their beliefs I cannot go with them; but we praise the same God, we trust in the same Christ, we seek the guidance of the same blessed Spirit, and so I am content. If I had my will, I should attend the little Independent chapel down in the town, but I do not see that it is my duty to defy Mrs. Jevons, by so

doing. If our church were High Church—if—forgive me!—if what I hold to be the dogmas of Rome were taught, *I could not* in conscience go there. It is not so; it is rather a cramped and limited Gospel that is preached, and I demur sometimes at the way in which it is preached, but still it is the Gospel, as far as it goes; and I am not told to trust in sacraments instead of in my Saviour. And I am not bidden to love and worship a dead but a living Christ, and so I am content to sink many minor differences of opinion, and be happy in the communion of the Establishment—for the present, at least.”

“And can you not be content to sink such differences as you find between my Church, and—I was going to say yours, but I believe Dissenters have no Church?”

“You can know very little of Dissenters, if indeed you think so! The Church with them means the company of the faithful, the household of God upon earth; it counts as its members all who love the Lord and manifest their love by striving to do His will. The Church is, in fact, the family, with Christ as its Head. Some of the children are on this side of the river; others, a great multitude whom no man can number, are on the other—the farther side.”

“What river do you mean?” asked Aubrey, to whom this figure of speech was entirely new.

“The river of Death, which we all must cross, which so many have crossed since the first went over, thousands of years ago. Don’t you know the old verse?—

“ ‘Lo! thousands to their endless home  
Are swiftly borne away;  
And we are to the margin come,  
And soon must launch as they.’ ”

“I never heard it before. It is very beautiful. Whose is it?”

“It is Charles Wesley’s, I believe; I thought everybody knew Watts and Wesley pretty well. We Dissenters claim Watts and Wesley as peculiarly our own; but the Church of England also loves their hymns well. The children here learn Watts’s hymns and Wesley’s, too, just as I learned them when I was a child.”

And Aubrey remembered his conversation, some months

before, with the Methodist gardener—a conversation which, somehow, had made a great impression on him.

"It is a fine idea, the river of death," he resumed. "But, oh! Edith, how little we know what we shall find on the other side."

"If we do not know *what*, we do know *Who* we shall see when we reach the farther shore. Christ will be there. He has promised, and He will not fail. And with Him all must be joy, though the manner and fulness of that joy we cannot now conceive. We must wait, till life's shadows and death's mists have passed away."

"The mists of death! yes, there will be mists—cold and thick, perhaps."

"There are the mists of the falling night, and the mists of the dawn; but the evening mists are often fair and radiant. And what of the dawn mists? Did you ever watch the vapours on the mountain side grow rosy-tinged, and then golden, as they rolled up and away, and were seen no more in the full glory of the sunrise? Even so will the sun rise above its earthly, deathly mists, into the light of God's presence; the shadows may still fall on the vales beneath, but it is broad daylight on the hills—the shining hills of heaven. For the sting of death is taken away; death is swallowed up in victory."

"Thus star by star declines,  
Till all are passed away,  
As morning high and higher shines  
To pure and perfect day.  
Nor sink those stars in empty night,  
But hide themselves in Heaven's own light."

"Another verse of Wesley or Watts?"

"Oh, no! that is a verse by James Montgomery, another Dissenting poet."

"Do you know, I fancied that Dissenters were very illiterate people? A staunch Church of England man assured me, not long since, that they really were extremely ignorant, and far more to be pitied than to be scorned."

"It is a most common mistake, though one which every day refutes itself more and more. I assure you there are plenty of learned, cultivated, refined Dissenters, or, as I

prefer to call them, Nonconformists, for that really is their title of honour, which they won for themselves nearly two hundred years ago, when the Church of England, as by law established, drove them out from her communion."

"I had no idea that people of your stamp could be Nonconformists. I must know all about it."

"As a Roman Catholic, I do not think you *can* know all about it. Rome does not permit free inquiry to her children."

"But, Edith, if I persist in my liberty as a freeborn, intellectual Englishman, who shall restrain me?"

"Your Church will restrain you, or cast you forth from her bosom. To go out is one thing, to be cast out is another. Mr. Seaton, neither your priest nor your father will give consent to your marriage with me, a Protestant—and a *heretic*! When it comes to the point, your own conscience will refuse to give consent."

And in his heart of hearts Aubrey knew that she spoke the truth. But hope was still strong within him, though he had been told that it was impossible to convert a Dissenter—who conscientiously dissented—to the faith of Rome.

"But, my beloved one," he whispered, "you will listen to reason, you will be instructed? Believe me, our Church is the true Church—within whose blessed pale is certain salvation—though I, for my part, cannot deny salvation to other Churches! You need not embrace *all* the dogmas of Catholicism—I do not hold them myself. Surely our worship is most heavenly! I would take care that you never should be unduly urged to anything that was really painful; you should never suffer the smallest compulsion. Only accept the leading articles of our creed, be reconciled to the Church, who would accept you with open arms, and all will be well. Neither my father nor I are bigots, and Millicent, my sister, my only home sister, holds the very broadest views."

"What dogmas must I accept? Must I believe in transubstantiation? Must I kneel before a piece of bread and call it my God?"

"You could scarcely be a Catholic and not hold the *Real Presence* in the Blessed Sacrament. But indeed that

doctrine is held by many Protestants, and there is Scripture warrant for it. Your own New Testament says, '*This is My body* !' "

"By which I understand this *signifies* My body—this bread is its type, its figure. No, I can never, never bow down to a wafer, to what you call the *Host*. My Lord Jesus Christ is in heaven, from whence I look for His glorious appearing. By partaking of the bread and wine, I only show my loyalty to Christ my Master, and I with the whole Church militant here upon earth do thus show forth His death *till He come*. And *confession*—should I have to confess ? "

"Occasionally ; only occasionally. Some very good Catholics confess but seldom. I do not approve of women, especially married women, being frequently in the confessional."

"And I *never* could confess to a mortal man. No priest shall ever come between my soul and God. And I will not, cannot, own any mediator but Jesus Christ."

"You speak with great decision. Will you not let me explain a few things—some which are so easy to prove, that you cannot but receive them ? "

"If it will please you I will listen to what you wish to say. I do not hold my faith on the mere assertions of others. I am not ashamed of my convictions. But I warn you that on some points, and those which your Church holds most essential, we shall never agree. Could we then consistently set out on life's journey together ? Could we be true husband and wife with a gulf between our souls over which neither of us could pass ? "

"Nevertheless, my dear one, I have hopes, if you will only give me a calm, impartial hearing—I do believe, God helping me, that I can convince you."

"If God would only let me convince you, how happy I should be ! "

And then Mrs. Jevons, hoping the wedding-day was fixed, came back again, and the conversation ended.

"What a strange wooing ! " thought Edith, as she lay sleepless on her bed that night.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

## "THE HALF-WAY HOUSE."

"Silence rose up where hearts no hope could share :  
Alas ! for those that love, and may not blend in prayer !"

MRS. JEVONS was what she called "quite taken aback" when she discovered the impediment to the speedy marriage of the two young people whom she had undertaken to patronise. Nevertheless, she did not despair; Edith was quite right "not to unite herself to an idolater"—that was the way in which Mrs. Jevons put it; but every effort must be made for the conversion of Aubrey Seaton, and he must be induced at any cost to abjure the errors of Romanism out of hand. Conversions, however, are not so easily managed as a good many self-satisfied and positive people imagine. After several long and earnest conversations, Aubrey found that he had made no way with Edith, and Edith, much more to her sorrow than to her surprise, discovered that Aubrey, though willing to concede much, resolutely held to the first principles of the faith in which he had been so carefully educated. Mrs. Jevons tried her skill, using strong language and certain stereotyped arguments, which had always appeared to her as perfectly incontrovertible,—a very common mistake in the case of persons who simply receive without much examination the teaching of their own school of theology. Aubrey, perfectly convinced in his own mind, and well versed in all the sophistries of his creed, speedily shattered the second-hand propositions of this zealous lady, and almost succeeded in shaking the foundations of her own religious faith. People of Mrs. Jevons' mental and spiritual calibre had best leave controversy alone; they are sure to be worsted in the combat, even though they have truth on their side, chiefly because they have always looked at truth from one side only, and obstinately refuse to take any other view of it than that which their own standpoint

immediately commands. Bewildered, and almost terrified, Mrs. Jevons retired abruptly from the field; "to fight and run away" was clearly her most expedient policy, for she felt that if she remained to urge her convictions she would soon have no convictions left to urge, so successfully did Aubrey assail the strongholds of her own belief.

"I will never argue again with a Papist," she said, when recounting her experiences to Mrs. John Slater. "They are prompted by the father of lies himself, and it is written, 'Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.'" That there could be any other interpretation of this passage, than that which refers to the Church of Rome, never once entered into Mrs. Jevons's mind.

Aubrey himself was deeply disappointed, for his most carefully prepared propositions were of no more weight with Edith than were her patroness's vapid denunciations and positive assertions with himself. When the controversy ceased they were wider apart than before, for each one had gathered strength in the doctrines severally embraced. Edith perceived that in spite of a good deal of liberalism her lover held most tenaciously to some of the most fundamental principles of Romanism, and, as he fully believed that they were the bases of the Christian faith, and underlying the very pillars of Christendom, she could not blame him. She would have loved him less had he not been true to his convictions. He, on his part, sighed—and perhaps in secret wept—when he clearly comprehended the state of Edith's mind. Not one step would she take towards a compromise with that which she esteemed, and intelligently esteemed, to be deadly and God-dishonouring error.

"We do not end even where we began," said Aubrey sadly, at the close of their last conversation; "we seem more widely separated than when we first agreed to talk the matter over."

"I cannot say that it is not so," replied Edith, in a tone which showed how much she felt.

"Yet still, if you would conform in some things, I would joyfully sink many of the differences between us.

If we both yielded certain points, which are certainly non-essentials ——”

“It is impossible; for when we had yielded everything that could be yielded without actually ceding all, we should still be standing on opposite sides of the grand barrier which divides our Churches. We should be constantly arrayed against each other; the sweetest bond of Christian union would be wanting; each would hold the other as an alien in the camp. No, Aubrey, I cannot, dare not tamper with my conscience. God has given me light; I feel in my heart that it is the light of His own Spirit, and I may not be unfaithful to it. Do not urge me—do not make my hard task harder.”

And then, man like, Aubrey in his bitter disappointment was unjust, unkind. “You do not love me,” he said. “I am no more to you than any other man. You will not, for my sake, sacrifice even trivialities: a woman who really loves will always make sacrifices.”

“Any sacrifice but this,” she answered mournfully. “If I trifled with my convictions now, that would be self-love, not love of you. Do you think I have no womanly weakness? Do you think I am not tempted to relinquish the strife, and link my fate with yours, whatever it may be? If it were only poverty, exile, shame even, that would come upon me if I shared your life, do you suppose I should hesitate?”

“Are you sure you would not?”

“I am quite sure I should not, for I love you, Aubrey Seaton!—and I shall love you always. You know little of a true woman’s love if you can doubt this.”

“You love me, but you will not marry me.”

“I may retort, and say you will not marry me; for unless I renounce some of my supposed heresies, unless I come at least to the half-way house, you will not venture to make me your wife.”

And Aubrey knew that she only spoke the truth. He neither would nor could take back to Southerleigh, as Mrs. Aubrey Seaton, so pronounced a heretic. He began to feel a bitter spite against Dissenters—not against Edith herself, but to the class to which she was allied; for to be a Dissenter of any sort was to be a double-dyed,

obstinate, uncompromising *heretic*! Of all kinds of heresy theirs was the most hopeless, the farthest away from the true fold of the Church.

He was vexed with Edith, and yet he could not part from her in anger. At the same time he was resolving to trouble himself about her no more, but to go on his way, leaving her to her heresies and to Mrs. Jevons, and to marry the first fair lady who promised to be at all suitable. He could not help feeling himself injured, and he showed it in every word he uttered.

"You are right," he said, coldly. "That is just where it is: you will not come to the half-way house, as you call it; you will not examine for yourself the claims of our ancient Church, as shadowed faintly forth in Anglo-Catholic communion. Become a member of the Church of England, and that is all I ask."

"I am to some extent a member of the Church of England at this moment. I go with Mrs. Jevons to the communion of the Lord's Supper every month."

"The church which the Jevonses attend is as good as no church at all, as I have ascertained during my stay in Luncheon. Even the parish church is not what it ought to be. The Anglo-Catholic Church, though faulty and very imperfect, is the only true Church of England, Edith."

"Then God help England! Aubrey, I cannot be an Anglo-Catholic; if I could, I see nothing to prevent me from going further. Indeed, I think I should prefer Rome to Oxford; I do not like compromises. The half-way house is an unsatisfactory resting-place, unless you are intending to go the other half of the way. I must stay at home, or undertake the whole distance."

"Some day I think you will go the whole distance. Some day, Edith, you will come to me."

"And the hope in my heart is not dead—the hope that some day you will come to me; that some day you will cease to worship a dead Christ instead of a living Saviour; that some day you will cease to call Mary the mother of God, and refuse to pay her the honours which are due only to the Lord Himself."

"Not call Mary the mother of God? Why, is it possible that Dissenters do not believe the Bible!"

"The Bible never says she is the mother of God ; it utters no such blasphemy. God was made man ; He took upon Him human nature ; He arrayed Himself in mortal form and substance, and of that form and substance only was Mary mother. His Godhead proceeded from the Father."

"If you knew how sweet is the worship of Mary, the Queen of Heaven, you would not utter aught in her dispraise."

"But I cannot own her as the Queen of Heaven. She is just a dead woman gone to glory, like any other departed saint ; nor do I believe she can help me, though I cry to her day and night. I might just as well call on Baal."

"Yet think how she suffered ! How pure, how holy she was, how patient, how meek ! She knew all human sorrow, even to its depths. She drank the cup of bitterness to its very dregs. Every pain and grief of frail mortality she knew ; and, therefore, she can sympathise with mortals in their afflictions."

"She might if she *could* know them, perhaps ; but being simply a dead woman, I do not see how she is to tell who suffers, and who asks her aid. Only God reads the heart ; only Christ was tempted as we are. He knows all, and that is enough. I do not need Mary ; I do not need the saints. I need only Christ my Lord, the King of glory, and yet once the Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief.

" ' On Him I lean, who, not in vain,  
Experienced every human pain.' "

No, Aubrey, it is this worship of Mary which seems to me, equally with the dogma of transubstantiation and the practice of the confessional, to bar my entrance into your Church. I cannot bow my soul to Mariolatry."

"What a phrase to apply to the Blessed Virgin !"

"I can't see why you Romanists should make Mary out to be a sort of old maid," said Mrs. Jevons, who had just entered, and heard with pleasure Edith uttering her protest against Mariolatry. "It does seem such stuff, and so uncomplimentary too ! I know you call her 'ever a Virgin,'—such utter nonsense. I have more respect for

her than you have, for I am certain she was a respectable married woman, an excellent wife, and the best of mothers to her own and Joseph's children. She may have made mistakes sometimes, but then the best of us do that, married or unmarried, Mr. Seaton. Take my word for it, when you are an old married man, with a family of children about you, your wife, whoever she may be, will be just what Mary was in her latter days. Only, of course, Mary was a widow, else our Lord would have thought it unnecessary to commend her to John's care. It's very disrespectful of you, I repeat, to call her 'ever a Virgin,' which is tantamount to saying she was an old maid; all but a term of reproach. Anyway, a woman's husband and children are her pride and crown."

"I know that the brothers and sisters of Jesus are mentioned in the Gospel—at least His brethren are; but, by 'brethren,' we are to understand *kindred*."

"I do not see why we should. If the Bible says one thing and means another in this case it may do the same in any other, and then what have we to go by? What comfort can the Bible be if it loses its authority? We Protestants stick to the text, however, and we don't allow crafty priests to teach us that black is white. We use our own common sense, and trust God to bless us in the using of it. There! good morning, and give Mary the honours due to her as a respectable married woman; I should be ashamed to make an old maid of her, heretic as I am."

Aubrey went away in disgust. And yet Mrs. Jevons's rough words strongly impressed him. Why did his Church attach such honour and importance to a single state? What would become of the world if it were filled with holy nuns and monks? But just then Aubrey remembered that nuns and monks are not necessarily pious and pure, and he had begun to doubt the wisdom of the policy which enforces celibacy on the priesthood. All the stories he had heard and read could not be mere inventions; indeed, there was no reason to doubt the scandals occasioned by the irregularities of the cloister—even Catholics themselves could not and did not attempt to deny them, though they talked loudly of Protestant exaggerations. And Aubrey's face crimsoned as he recalled one or two small episodes in

the lives of the holy fathers with whom he had spent his boyhood—episodes inexplicable to the innocent boy, but plain enough to the full-grown man, who was beginning to understand humanity and to know the world.

"Pshaw! pshaw!" he said, impatiently, as he walked once more down the Burnthorpe Road. "They had better get married, nine-tenths of them; and the remaining tenth had better come out of their cells and serve God among their fellow-creatures. I have no sympathy with recluses, no love for the cloister, no respect for any unnatural mode of life—what is unnatural cannot be to God's glory."

But Aubrey saw Edith again, and then he thought only of his love for her, and of the parting which could no longer be deferred. "I was ungenerous, I was cruel," he said passionately. "I know you love me, even as I love you. This question of religion—it is like the angel's flaming sword which kept Adam and Eve out of Eden—it keeps us from the happiness which might so soon be ours. Farewell, Edith; remember always that I honour you and love you more than words can tell."

And so they parted: Aubrey went back to Southerleigh, to his father's great content. But a little later in the autumn he was seized with violent illness, and his life was despaired of. All through the winter he was an invalid, and in the spring, as soon as he was able to travel, he and Millicent went abroad—Father Eustace undertaking to be Francis Seaton's companion. A few months more, and Francis Seaton was dead. He died suddenly while sitting in his arm-chair, and just then there happened to be some mistake about the address which Aubrey and his sister had transmitted to Southerleigh. Father Eustace's black-edged missive went to the place they had just quitted, and there it remained for want of a little energy on the part of the postal authorities, who quietly treated it as *poste restante*, making believe that the owners of the letter would presently return to the obscure mountain village, which they never saw again.

Thus it was that Father Fabian, who came to the funeral, did not meet the new master of Southerleigh, and he was well pleased that they should not meet. Father Eustace—kindly, stupid, and not too rigid in his notions—

gave Aubrey an excellent character. He told Father Fabian that his former pupil was a credit to him, and an ornament to the Holy Catholic Church. He could not say he was quite as zealous in the interests of that Church as could be wished, but he was quite sound. Oh, yes! no doubt about that, as sound as Father Fabian himself could desire! He was young and ardent, and loved pleasures; oh, no! not sinful pleasures, only such pleasures as a Christian man, a true Catholic, might enjoy.

"That devotion to the Church, which has long characterised his family, is *in him*, I am certain," said Father Eustace. "In middle life he will manifest those virtues which have always distinguished his race. You see, young men don't like to be interfered with. If I held the reins too tightly there might be resistance. That would tend to distrust, to insubordination—perhaps to fatal revolt. As it is, we are the best of friends, we understand each other."

"Well!" said Father Fabian, "I am glad to hear it, only remember, you are accountable here. It is arranged that I shall have nothing to do with Southerleigh while I hold my present anxious position at Seatondale. It would be a case of 'between two stools,' you comprehend; and Seatondale, as it stands, is of infinitely more importance to the Church than Southerleigh. Southerleigh needs only common precaution and ordinary prudence; the ground is your own, and you have simply to keep it. Seatondale is yet to be won for our Holy Church, and by all the saints, brother, I swear to you that it is well worth the winning! It is a rich prize in itself, and it is clearly the stepping-stone to a thousand advantages. Only to do my work at Seatondale, I can have no connection with Southerleigh. Aubrey Seaton and I are best apart, for a few years at least. Had he remained heir of Seatondale, I should never have quitted his side; my place now is with the infant heiress and her worthy father, who I am fast making into a sound Anglo-Catholic."

"Will he ever be anything more?"

"Probably not. It does not matter. The child of an Anglo-Catholic is easily brought up in true Catholicism; and Mademoiselle Annette will know her work. I think



we must wait till the little lady inherits; I mean we must move cautiously till then. Ah, brother, how much is lost by foolish rashness! What splendid possibilities are ruined by hot impatience! You will let Aubrey know that I paid the last honours to the remains of his good father?"

"Surely I will. Poor lad! he will grieve sorely that he was absent at such a time."

"Of course, of course! You must get him married very quickly. He is to wed Lady Euphrasia."

"He does not seem to admire the Lady Euphrasia, and he has had another love affair."

Father Fabian pricked up his ears like a horse which hears the halloo of the huntsmen.

"What is that?" he said, quickly. "Aubrey Seaton is not free to wed where he will."

"Calm yourself, Brother Fabian; it is past and over—the young lady turned out to be a heretic, and our Aubrey would none of her. I know little about the matter, for the father and son kept their own counsel, and Millicent is always reticent."

"That you should not permit; the confessional should remedy that. If a confessor do not know every secret of his penitent's heart and life, he may as well know nothing. You must gain Millicent's full confidence."

"Oh, there is really nothing to confide," replied Father Eustace, who had not confessed Millicent for many months. He did not care to tell Father Fabian this, for he would at once interfere, and Father Eustace did not want his present calm, easy-going life to be disturbed. He only said further, "It is all right; all right, brother; these children are good and innocent; good people are best let alone."

And Father Fabian was so fully taken up with the politics of Seatondale, that he refrained from any further meddling with what was now, *by order*, the province of Father Eustace. He went back contentedly to Malham Tower, trusting that all would go well at Southerleigh. He said little about Aubrey to his uncle, but that little was calculated to keep them apart. For a hundred reasons it would not do to have Aubrey at Seatondale.

The master of Southerleigh came back at last, truly mourning the father who had left him in sole authority.

He stayed awhile, under compulsion, seeing lawyers, settling business matters, and investing Millicent's fortune. The other sisters had received their full portions on their taking the veil. Then Aubrey, with Millicent for his companion, went forth again on his travels, and this time he crossed the ocean. He remained so long in America, that it was rumoured he intended staying there. Sometimes months elapsed, and no news of its master reached deserted Southerleigh. It was said, too, that he was married to a beautiful American lady, very wealthy and a devoted Catholic, but this report needed confirmation.

As to Edith, she resided, as I told you, three years at Almira House, then the course of events so shaped themselves that she saw her way clear to a superior situation. She never forgot Aubrey, but she mourned him as one dead. Year after year she felt the hope which had once sustained her growing fainter and fainter. Aubrey would never come back to her—never tell her that she was right, and that he had freed himself from the bondage of his mother Church. And she herself was further than ever from the "half-way house" to which Aubrey would have lured her; for Anglicanism had grown and thriven amazingly, and the State Church was becoming every day more and more permeated by the spirit of covert Popery.

In the house of Mrs. Fulford, Mrs. Clifford had first seen her, and admired her, wishing often that she were rich enough to transplant her to Seatondale as the instructress of her own uneducated daughters. Mrs. Fulford, however, was now sending her children to a French school, to undergo that wonderful process known as "finishing," and Edith was again compelled to seek another home.

## CHAPTER XXV.

SISTER AUGUSTINE.

"See what a ready tongue suspicion hath!  
He that but fears the thing he would not know,  
Hath, by instinct, knowledge from others' eyes:  
That what he feared is chanced."

AND so Edith Armstrong came to live at Seaton Hall. Nothing was said in the household until she actually arrived; not one of the servants knew that she was expected, only Mrs. Jeliffe had given orders to prepare rooms for a lady who would remain for an extended visit.

As the housemaids were busy about their work, Mademoiselle Annette, who made it a rule to know all that went on in the establishment, made her appearance, demanding, "For why do you clean again this room, which was cleaned only last week, Nancy, *ma fille*?"

"Because Mrs. Jeliffe gave her orders," replied Nancy, sullenly. "And we keep our rooms nice and clean in England," she continued. "I've heard say as it's quite the other way in your country, Mam'selle; but there, Papists always are horrid dirty, I've heard my father say, and he was in Spain and other foreign countries when he was a young man, and so he ought to know."

"The English are *very* clean, particular people," replied Mam'selle, in a conciliatory tone. "The French have no nice, handy housemaids, like yourself, Nancy. How you do make that mahogany shine!"

"Yes, and with elbow grease, too! good honest English, North-country elbow grease, Mam'selle; none of your *French* polish for me; I don't believe in it; it's like a good many things that come from France—not *what it seems*!"

Mademoiselle looked sharply at Nancy; what had made her so inordinately impertinent? None of the servants liked

the *gouvernante*, though she flattered, and to some extent used to bribe them; but lately it seemed as if mere dislike, or rather, non-liking, had grown into positive aversion, and Mrs. Jelffe, and Mr. Viner were more than ever taciturn and reserved in her presence, though at the same time treating her with scrupulous politeness. "Why does the wind now blow always from the cold quarter, I wonder!" she said one day, as she shrugged her shoulders, and felt just a little annoyed at the housekeeper's pointed coldness. "Do they suspect? *Ma foi!* But that must not be! I am getting tired of this. I make not my way in this accursed heretic family; only, I have the leetle Mees at my disposal, and that is what matters most of all. She will never grow up a bigoted Protestant now. I have prepared the soil and sown the good seed, so that, come what will, my work is partly done. There is nothing like taking the children when they are quite young; early impressions are worth so much. Ah! do I not know it! It was good that *Madame la Générale* did die."

She got nothing out of Nancy, who, indeed, had little to disclose. She and the under-housemaid were required to prepare a sitting-room and bed-room for immediate occupation, and they guessed from various indications that the expected visitor was of the gentler sex. At last, when Mam'selle persisted, Nancy replied tartly, "Indeed, Mam'selle, I can tell you nothing more. You had better go and ask Mrs. Jelffe, or perhaps you'd better try headquarters at once, and question the General. It's no business of yours, as I can see, who comes or who goes. I wonder if all French folks are so prying and curious!"

Thus baffled, Mam'selle returned to her own quarters, feeling, she scarcely knew why, just a little disquieted in her mind. Straws show the way the wind blows, and a good many straws and odds and ends blowing about her path of late had put her rather on the *qui vive*. It was part of her profession to be prepared for all sorts of exigencies and emergencies, and she had been sedulously trained to the observance of all outward signs, and of every trifling rise or fall in the social atmosphere. And now she could not be quite sure which way the wind *was* blowing, only that they were not propitious gales for her

or for her schemes she was tolerably certain. Had she been indiscreet? she asked herself. Had she gone too fast? Had she in any single instance disobeyed commands? She could not remember that she had in the least committed herself. She had always treated the General with the profoundest deference and respect, and her pupil was fonder of her and more docile and impressible than ever. Still—she questioned herself again and again, and ever with increased anxiety,—“which way does the wind blow?”

It seems a very little thing to be disturbed about, the arrangement of two rooms for a visitor unknown. But then visitors were rare at Seaton Hall, especially lady visitors; since Mademoiselle Annette had assumed her post as *gouvernante*, only one—a deaf, weak-minded old dowager, one of the Damarels—had made any stay in the house, and her coming was advertised for a month before she made her appearance, and the best apartments were made ready for her reception. And as Mam’selle quickly discovered her to be a very silly woman, she knew exactly the sort of flatteries that would be most palatable, and so befuddled her that they parted as sworn friends. It was unfortunate that Father Fabian should be absent just when his supervision seemed so necessary, and that Mam’selle by some strange ill-luck did not know where to address him. For once there was a slight hitch in the generally perfect arrangements of Father Fabian, Mrs. Darcy, and Mam’selle Annette. Damiano was absent with his master—no one exactly knew where.

Just as Mademoiselle had concluded, to her great chagrin, that she would have to wait for the information she desired—for asking Mrs. Jelfie was quite out of the question, as Nancy knew quite well—a propitious fate sent her the very person she desired, in the shape of pretty, careless Lucy, the under-housemaid, who, rushing along the passages with her arms full of the floating muslin curtains lately confided to her by the housekeeper, managed to tear one curtain by catching the border against the sharp corner of an elaborately carved cabinet. It was a terrific rent, for Lucy was going at full speed, trying to make up for time she had lost in holding a stolen gossip

with her sweetheart, who happened at that moment to be in the house, employed as jobbing carpenter.

Lucy had been in trouble of one sort or another for a good while; she was what Mrs. Jeliffe called "such an unlucky girl." She was pretty and smart, and could do her work well and quickly, provided she gave her mind to her task, which too often was not the case. Her lucklessness came of harum-scarum carelessness, and more than girlish heedlessness; her love affairs, which were entirely *sub rosa*, took up a good deal of her time, so that she was continually betrayed into the mistake of making more haste than good speed. Lucy, as a natural consequence, smashed, and cracked, and rent many things that with a little common care might have escaped without injury, and the result was a great deal of scolding from Mrs. Jeliffe, and the frequent threat of being dismissed her service in disgrace.

Mam'selle came upon Lucy, standing at one of the windows, holding up to the light the damaged muslin, and weeping over it in a way which threatened to take out all the starch.

"Now, Lucie, *mon enfant*, what's to do?" briskly inquired Mam'selle, adopting the vernacular of the district.

"This is to do," replied Lucy with a loud sob; "I was all in a hurry, and the nasty thing catches against that horrid piece of furniture, and goes tear all along in a moment. And Mrs. Jeliffe will be so angry; she told me only this very morning, when I broke a salt-cellar and a china plate, and scalded the cat, that if I did any more mischief before the week was out she'd turn me away there and then, without a character. And oh! I'd break my heart if I was sent away from Seatondale, and in disgrace, too."

"There, there! do not cry. *Ohut! chut!* I tell thee," said Mademoiselle, soothingly. "Crying never got anybody out of trouble yet. Come into my room and let me look at the rent. Ah, a very pretty piece of carelessness, Mees Lucie! Yes, Madame will be furious if she sees it."

"And she must see it; for Nancy will never put this up, and I shall have to go and ask for another set of curtains. Oh dear, oh dear! what an unlucky girl I am!"

"*Tais-toi!* I tell thee then, be silent! Wipe your

eyes, lock the door, and give me my red morocco work-box. Now thread that very fine muslin needle with that very fine cotton. No, stay. I have some muslin ravelings here; that will be better. Now my spectacles—there, I will soon hide thy fault, for I learned when I was young what the *jeunes filles* learn not now, the excellent art of fine drawing. I can mend muslin so that you cannot see that it has been mended. Now, carry the other curtains straight to Nancy,—she may not miss this one directly, for there are three others. When she says there is one short curtain—one curtain short, I mean—reply that you must have left that one behind. Put off going for it as long as you can; and if I can manage well I shall have it ready when it is wanted, and no one shall ever know that you have it injured.”

“Oh, thank you, Mam’selle; thank you for ever and ever! You’re the kindest creature! I always do stand up for you, and say you are not what they make you out to be.”

“And what do they make me out to be?” asked the Frenchwoman, as she skilfully and swiftly repaired the rent.

“They do say you’re a *Jesuit*, Mam’selle. Not that I know what a *Jesuit* is, though I suppose it’s something very deceitful. And always I stand up and say you are *not*.”

“Quite right, Lucie, *ma petite*. Bah! what folly these *Seatondalers* do talk! A *Jesuit*! so droll! I wish I were a *Jesuit*, Lucie, for the *Jesuits* are rich and powerful—oh, so powerful; and then they are clever, and I am but a poor, weak woman, with scarcely any friends, and only clever with my needle, and scissors, and my fingers, and I am getting old. *He’las!* I wish I were what you call *Jesuit*.”

“And I am sure I wish you were, then, Mam’selle,” returned the grateful Lucy, gathering up billowy folds of muslin as she spoke. “I should like to see you rich and powerful, that I should.”

“Thank you, Lucie, for your good wishes; but now go your way, my child, and presently I will talk to you.”

Two hours later, Mam’selle had learnt all about the gar-

niture of the rooms which had been so suddenly prepared. "They were for a lady?" Oh, yes, certainly; the toilet-table told that; the best lace was brought out, and the best essence-bottles, and the rooms were altogether fit for a lady, and for one who was young and beautiful, Lucy thought. And Nancy had never so much as looked at the torn curtain; she had only scolded her for *forgetting* it, when they were so busy.

"And when does the lady arrive?" asked Mam'selle.

"Ah, that I do not know. No one knows but Mrs. Jeliffe, and perhaps Mr. Viner."

"Is there a late dinner preparing?"

"No, I am sure there is not; there has been no late dinner this long while. Oh, Mam'selle, I'll never forget how you got me out of my trouble; I should have been sent away, I know I should, if that ill-tempered Nancy had complained to Mrs. Jeliffe."

"Well, you must be more careful in future. I shall not always be able to help you; and remember, Lucy, it is the duty of a good domestic to be thoughtful and discreet. And, above all things, my little one, be quite sure always to tell the truth."

Towards evening Mam'selle contrived to slip into the rooms just made ready for the mysterious guest. Yes, Lucy was right; it was a lady, and a young lady, who was expected. The toilet-table was elegantly draped, all sorts of nick-nacks were disposed in both apartments, and the sitting-room was quite a charming little boudoir. Mam'selle was very far from suspecting the truth, but she did not like the idea of a lady-visitor, who might possibly be empowered to superintend her in her capacity of *gouvernante*; and she had a curious sort of presentiment that in some way the advent of the unknown would affect her own position. She would not have cared so much had Father Fabian been at Malham Tower to direct her; but to make one false step just now would be so dangerous, if not altogether ruinous. And it was so provoking that she could not see her way before her—her way which had presented so few difficulties hitherto.

There remained but one alternative; she must go and see Mrs. Darcy—Mrs. Darcy, who always patronised and



sometimes browbeat her. And then it was not quite easy to get to Malham Tower without being missed in the house; she had been instructed not to visit the Tower openly, except it were on some most specious pretence which could not possibly raise any suspicion; nor was she to visit it at all, unless for reasons of a most imperative nature. But if any sudden crisis arose, or if summoned thither, she was immediately to present herself.

"I *must* see Mother Bridget to-night," said Mademoiselle, as she looked across the park, on which the shadows of evening had already fallen. "Father Fabian ought to know of this arrival, and I know no more than the girl Lucy where he may be at this moment. Perhaps he is in retreat, perhaps he is doing penance; but that he is not at St. Gudule-le-Pont I am well assured. I hate to have to bow myself to Mother Bridget, but I suppose I have no alternative."

A little later, when Beatrice was fairly in bed and asleep, Mademoiselle in her garden shawl and *capote* presented herself at the window of Mrs. Jelffe's room. "I am going for a little promenade, by the mere side," she said meekly and simply. "I have such a terrible headache! I know there is thunder in the air. If Missy rings her bell, which is not at all likely, will you order one of the girls to answer it, please? I shall not be long away. *Ah, Ciel!* how happy you are never to have these dreadful heavy headaches."

"I have heard they are ten times worse than bilious headaches," replied Mrs. Jelffe, good-naturedly. She was always tender to any one suffering from physical causes, and Mademoiselle really did have terrible nervous headaches, doubtless of neuralgic origin, though in those days neuralgia was called *tic douloureux*. And a very dolorous *tic* it is, as everybody who really knows it will testify. At that moment, however, Mademoiselle was as free from neuralgia as from dropsy or colic; she was really very well, though worried and filled with undefined anxieties; but she looked deplorable, and spoke in a low whisper. "Yes, you had better take a little walk; and I would go with you only I am expecting to be wanted every minute," continued the housekeeper. "I would not go to the mere though, if I

were you ; I would keep on the higher ground ; there is a nice breeze on the slopes behind the house. Have a glass of wine before you go ? ”

“ Thank you, no ; I had some sherry and water half an hour since, and it made my head worse. I thought I would turn out for a little air, and then go to my bed. I shall be all right in the morning.”

“ These nervous headaches must be shocking ! ” said Mrs. Jeliffe, as she resumed her newspaper.

“ No, I can’t abide Mam’selle, as no one knows better than yourself, Mr. Viner ; but I’d be sorry for a cat or dog in real pain, and Mam’selle does suffer dreadfully when it comes upon her.”

“ She should take steel and port-wine,” replied Mr. Viner, drily. He did not feel in the least sympathetic. Meanwhile, Mam’selle having paced for a few minutes along what were called the slopes, struck off suddenly, under cover of a clump of fir-trees, into a path leading directly through a dark wood, and through a narrow ravine, or gully rather, on to the heath which commanded Malham Tower. It was the direct road to the Tower, but one which no one professed to use, as it was really nothing more than an overgrown and irregular path among tangles said to be haunted by snakes, as well as by a ghost, whom no one, save “ Mr. Dam,” had ever encountered. And he, taking the short cut to the Hall one night, being on urgent business, had seen, as he declared, a tall, white, shadowy figure like a cloud, wringing its hands and tossing its arms about like one distraught ! And Mam’selle, in common with a good many more unscrupulous people, had a secret dread of ghosts—*les revenants*, as she called them ; nevertheless, she chose to take the wood-path partly that she might arrive more quickly at her destination, and partly to avoid the risk of meeting any of the servants, who might report that she had been seen on the way to Malham Tower.

No ghost, however, appalled her ; she saw “ nothing worse than herself,” as people say ; and as for snakes, if a few glided about her feet, it was surely that the reptiles came out to greet a creature subtle and cold-blooded as themselves. Only an owl, brushing across her face, startled her as she came out of the thicket on to the

higher ground above the ravine. Strange shadows from old, fantastic yews lay athwart her path, and weird shapes seemed hovering about, as she made the last few yards of the journey on the heath, and she shuddered, and felt the cold perspiration beaded on her brow.

"What a fool I am!" she muttered. "I've got the horrors to-night, I think. I see and hear omens in everything around me. I feel the most terrible presentiment. Ah; what was that?" and she caught her breath in sudden terror. It was only some wild creature awakened by her own movements; but—but was it an animal that breathed so hard not many paces from her? and, yes, she surely heard the clanking of a chain! That fright was soon dispelled, for the chain was around the fore feet of a donkey of straying propensities, and the creature was taking his scanty supper among the juniper bushes. And again Mam'selle exclaimed—"What a fool I am! But I am sure something is going to happen. I feel it in the air; I hear it in the rustle of the woods; I see it written in the dim air before me, and on the grey walls of Malham Tower."

It was not late, but Malham Tower looked dark as it had been years before, when no human creature dreamed of making it a habitable house. Only, as Mam'selle descended the rocky path, she could just see the dim altar light, faintly glimmering through the eastern window of the chapel—the chapel which was now fully restored, and ranked as one of the rarest gems of ecclesiastical architecture in all that county.

The scholars who generally tenanted the monks' chambers over the cloisters were nearly all absent, for it was vacation time; no dog barked, no gate banged to; all was silent as the grave—the very place itself looked dead; an awful shadow seemed hanging over the grey pile, as it rose solemnly among the hills, in the level beams of the fast-sinking moon.

Mam'selle rang the bell, not of the main entrance, but of a little postern door, which opened into the so-called moat, and in a minute or two a shutter was slipped back, and a face appeared at the grating, but the bolts were not withdrawn.

"Peace be to this house," said Mam'selle.

"And to all who dwell therein," replied the person on the other side. And then the door was opened, and Mam'selle found herself at last safe within stone walls.

"What brings you here, Sister Augustine?" said Mother Bridget, *alias* Mrs. Darcy, in a severe, abbess-like tone. Sister Augustine would have rejoiced could she have answered insolently; but, alas! she was sworn to obey Mother Bridget. She explained as briefly as possible, dwelling particularly on the unexpected arrival.

"And you don't know who she is, nor when she is to be looked for?" asked Mother Bridget in scorn. "Sister Augustine, you are not worth your salt! What is the use of your assuming a responsible post, if you neglect your simplest duties? What are you placed at Seaton Hall for, may I ask?"

"For the guidance and indoctrination of Mdlle. Beatrice," replied Sister Augustine, meekly.

"And also that nothing may take place—*nothing*, I say! no matter how seemingly unimportant—of which you shall not be cognisant, and of which your superiors shall not be duly informed."

"I have done my best," was the sister's humble rejoinder; but she could have ground her teeth with suppressed indignation. "They do not trust me as once they did."

"If you bungle, you cannot expect to be trusted."

"Mother Bridget," said Mam'selle Annette, quietly, "I came here to seek counsel, and, in Father Fabian's absence, direction. It will not help the difficulty that you only rate me, as if I were a heedless child. And I feel—I scarcely know why—that this matter is really serious."

Apparently Mother Bridget felt the reasonableness of this remark, for she altered her tone, and condescended to treat Sister Augustine with outward civility. "Have some supper," she said; "I was just going to begin when you rang the signal-bell."

"With all my heart," responded Sister Augustine. "I was so put out that I really could not enjoy my dinner. What have you got? Ah! one of your most charming

little *plats*, I see, and a *mayonnaise*. What wine? Burgundy, I think; it will suit me to-night better than *Bordeaux* or even *Lafitte*."

And, having eaten and drunken, Mother Bridget recovered her temper, and condescended to listen graciously to Sister Augustine, who opened her heart, and disclosed all her secret misgivings. Mother Bridget felt herself placed in a difficult position. It was not easy to judge of affairs so represented, and these excellent confederates were terribly afraid of taking a step in the wrong direction. Things had gone so smoothly all these years, and now there were undoubted symptoms of a change. They talked and talked with much earnestness and many significant gestures, without arriving at any satisfactory conclusions. But they agreed that Father Fabian must be communicated with immediately, and that his return was greatly to be desired.

"I'll write half a dozen letters to-morrow," said Mother Bridget, "and send them by a sure hand to the Luncheon post. One of the lot will surely find him, and a word will bring him back on the wings of the wind."

"You will not write in English, nor yet in French?"

Mother Bridget looked with contempt on Sister Augustine. "Do you take me for an idiot?" she inquired, tartly. "English and French, indeed! No, no, not I! I never run risks, Sister Augustine! My correspondence with the holy fathers is always *in cipher*. Now, you had better go back, or there will be a hue and cry after you. You have taken a long walk—of course, it has cured your headache."

Strange to say, Mam'selle had not been thought of. She invariably supped in her own sitting-room, and the maid who waited upon her had not reported her absence. As Mam'selle, like a cat, crossed as stealthily as possible the corridors and landings which she had to traverse, she came upon a heap of luggage—three trunks and a bonnet-case, which were all addressed as the property of "Miss Armstrong, Seaton Hall."

"So, then, she's come!" said Mam'selle under her breath. "Well, Miss Armstrong, I mean to know all about you before this time to-morrow."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

EXIT MADEMOISELLE ANNETTE.

“Talk not of beasts of prey, of coiling snake,  
That lurk in beds of flowers and tangled brake :  
The deadliest enemy of man is man.”

“Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding  
small ;  
Though with patience He stands waiting, with exactness grinds He  
all.”

THE General was delighted with Edith. Though only the wreck of what he had been, he was able now to sit up and see his friends in the oak parlour. He received her with effusion, and earnestly trusted she would be able to make herself happy at Seaton Hall, and promised that nothing should be neglected which could in any way conduce to her comfort ; as to remuneration, that was anything she pleased, provided she could win Beatrice's affections, and bring her up as it became the heiress of Seatondale to be brought up—an educated Christian gentlewoman, and a thorough Protestant !

But the General, like many more men of his stamp, was a coward as regarded women to whom it was necessary to show himself antagonistic. Weak and shaken as he was, he would rather have gone to the front of battle than face Mademoiselle Annette in the first moments of her anger and dismay ; that he should himself dismiss her was happily out of the question, for his state of health forbade any sort of exertion ; nor had he ever been in the habit—much to Mademoiselle's annoyance—of communicating with her personally. Messages and requests—which were, indeed, veiled commands—had always come to her through the medium of Mrs. Jelffe, or occasionally through Mrs. Clifford, whom she hated venomously. The question was at this moment which of them

should be deputed to give the *gouvernante* her *congé*. Mrs. Clifford begged that the unwelcome task might devolve on Mrs. Jelffe, while the housekeeper prayed the lady to undertake the duty.

"But," urged Mrs. Clifford, "it would be interfering with your province, Mrs. Jelffe—it is your place to engage and dismiss the servants, and I suppose we may class Mademoiselle as one of the upper servants?"

"Indeed, ma'am, but you may not," replied Mrs. Jelffe. "That is to say, she does not count herself as such, nor has she ever been amenable to my authority, nor acknowledged me as mistress. Besides, I did not engage her; I had nothing to do with her coming here, and therefore I would rather not send her away. Indeed, madam, it would only complicate affairs; I feel almost sure she will not accept dismissal from me—she will appeal to the higher authority. She will insist on seeing the General."

"Which, of course, cannot be permitted. Well, Mrs. Jelffe, I will do my best. I only wish the house had been cleared of her before Miss Armstrong appeared. I am afraid she will give us some trouble."

This conversation took place on the evening of Edith's arrival, while Mademoiselle was figuring as Sister Augustine at Malham Tower. It was clear, being already late, that nothing could be done that night, and Mademoiselle was supposed to have already retired. It struck both Mrs. Jelffe and Mrs. Clifford that it would be wise to keep her till the last moment in perfect ignorance of her own deposal, lest she should choose to play the part of invalid, and quarter herself upon them for many days to come.

"And that won't do at all," said the housekeeper; "for if she stopped under any pretence I should have no peace of my life, fearing she might do Miss Armstrong a mischief. I am not sure that she would stick at anything short of jeopardising her own precious neck."

Mrs. Clifford had felt the same distrust of the Frenchwoman, though she had not hinted it to any one. She heartily wished now that she had insisted on Mademoiselle's departure before Edith appeared upon the scene.

She resolved to lose no time next day in discharging herself of the trust committed to her.

"Give her a year's salary in advance," said the General, handing over to Mrs. Clifford a case of bank-notes; "pay what is due to the uttermost farthing, and the twelve-month's wages over and above. She shall not have to complain that an Englishman has treated her shabbily."

"And what am I to say when she demands an explanation? She will insist on knowing *why* she is thus summarily dismissed."

"Tell her what is the truth; that it is high time Miss Seaton's education was entrusted to a gentlewoman, and that I prefer the change to be a sudden one. You may tell her, too,—I don't see why you shouldn't,—that I do not approve of her Romish practices, and that I have grave suspicions of her being under my roof in a false character!"

Meanwhile, Mademoiselle had risen as usual, and breakfasted with Beatrice, who, child-like, was full of curiosity respecting the lady-visitor of whose advent she was naturally unapprised. "I wonder when I shall see her!" she exclaimed. "Mademoiselle, I had better have one of my pretty frocks on; I don't like this ugly dark gingham!"

"Oh, fie! Mademoiselle Beatrice. Young ladies should not be vain; they should not think too much about their *toilette*. Your dress is quite convenable, and I shall not alter it."

Beatrice pouted and argued, but she would not have had her way, only that a sudden thought struck Mademoiselle. It was bad policy to be at issues with the child, if there was any prospect of the intervention of a superior power between herself and her charge. That some one vested with a certain authority should be placed over her, she thought not impossible, but that her services would no longer be required had not occurred to her.

Presently came one of the maids with orders that Miss Beatrice should immediately go to her papa. Her dress was rapidly changed, and she ran off, exclaiming—"Perhaps papa will give me a holiday to-day, because of the



lady; and perhaps I may invite Phemie and Jeannie Clifford. I'll come back and tell you, Mademoiselle."

A few minutes later and Mrs. Clifford tapped at the door. Mrs. Jeliffe held herself in reserve, to interpose the forces, if required. A very few words explained to the *gouvernante* why she was visited so early. For a moment she was fairly dumb with consternation; then she rallied: "But, Madame, it is inconceivable; and I have done so much for *la petite Mademoiselle*! Ah, I know! it is that I have some secret enemy—some base one has slandered me to the noble General. Oh, cruel—cruel and perfidious!"

"I can reassure you on that point," replied Mrs. Clifford. "It was the General's own idea, his own proposition, that an educated and accomplished lady should at once undertake the education of his daughter. He feels that this change—for the child's sake—ought to have been made a year ago. It is of the utmost importance that she be early trained in all those habits and graces which befit her station and her position as a wealthy heiress."

"And is it, then, that I have allowed Mademoiselle to acquire vulgar habits, or that I have neglected to instil into her the maxims of gentility?" asked the *gouvernante*, in rising anger.

"We are quite satisfied that in all these particulars you have done your best," returned Mrs. Clifford; "but you must feel that it is quite time Miss Seaton had a regular governess, and the General prefers an English-woman; and furthermore, he instructed me to say that he is displeased with the religious teaching you have imparted. He does not think you are a sound Protestant; and that a Romish bias should be given to his daughter's principles is the last thing he could tolerate. He wills, therefore, that the connection between you and his family should abruptly cease. That he is behaving most honourably, this pocket-book and its contents will testify."

"Perish the money!" exclaimed Mademoiselle, furiously. "No, I will not be bought off; I will not be betrayed for filthy lucre. I will not touch the money that is to pay me for the loss of my darling little lady! Take back the pocket-book, Madame Clifford; I will none of its

contents. Pay me what is my due, and I will go—yes, I will go, because I cannot help it, because I am thrust out of the house in which for five years I have done my *devoir*—ah! and far more than my *devoir*! As for my religion, I am not what is called a *Methodist*—a canting Methodist. I am very High Church—a true Anglican; and I am as good a Protestant as Mr. Fabian is!”

Mrs. Clifford thought that was quite possible, but she was not going into that question with Mademoiselle Annette. She again pressed the money on her, and at last induced her to receive it. As she handed Mrs. Clifford the formal receipt which the General always exacted, she said, “And when is it that I must depart? How soon must I prepare?”

“The General wishes you to leave to-day. The upper housemaid will help you to pack, and the carriage will be in readiness to take you to Farleton station at any hour you may appoint. It is better both for Miss Seaton and for yourself that there should be no prolonged leave-taking.”

“Go away this very day, like a thief, like a vile person! I cannot and I will not go thus! I could not pack all my little properties so quickly, and the laundress, too, has many things of mine.”

“The laundress had orders three hours ago about your clothes. They will be here directly, and should you leave any trifle behind you, be quite sure that it will be safely forwarded to whatever address you please.”

“I tell you *I will not go*! I will not be put out like one who has wrought evil! I will see M. le Général myself!” And Mademoiselle rushed to the door.

“That you will not!” said Mrs. Jeliffe, coming to the rescue; for the woman’s resolute manner had rather daunted Mrs. Clifford. “That you will *not*, Mam’selle. The General is not sufficiently recovered to bear excitement. I would not answer for the consequences if you forced yourself upon him—not that there is any chance of your doing so, for Mr. Viner and Mr. Antony, the General’s own servant, are both in attendance, and, if need were, you should be locked up in your own rooms till you were ready to depart under proper escort.”

“I submit, then,” said Mademoiselle, white with the fury

she thought it only prudent to suppress. "But I go to tell all the world how, after five years' faithful service, I am thrust forth by the proud, ungrateful house of Seaton. Oh, *mon Dieu!* but it is shameful!"

"Mademoiselle," said Mrs. Clifford, "if it were only on account of the words you have just uttered, the General would think it desirable that you should resign your duties here. He heard his little girl cry out '*mon Dieu!*' only the other day, and he was, I need scarcely say, extremely shocked and surprised. We consider it a crime thus lightly to use God's holy name. It is, you know, a breach of the third commandment; also, such expressions are extremely unladylike—vulgar, indeed—and no Englishwoman of any reputation would dream of using them."

"Bah! there is no harm," returned Mademoiselle, with a sneer. "In my own country we all say '*mon Dieu.*' Why not? As for breaking the third commandment—bah! it is not Sunday. I have heard a duchess say '*mon Dieu;*' I have heard a princess of the blood say it."

"Possibly; but the swearing of high-born French women does not reconcile us, who are better taught, to the bad practice. And what has the third commandment to do with Sunday?"

"You not know, and you a priest's wife? The third commandment is—'Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day!'"

"I always thought that was the *fourth*."

"*Mais, certainement, non!* I know the Ten Commandments, Madame; I have known them ever since I was so high, and I have taught Mademoiselle Beatrice to recite them perfectly. Also the *Credo*, and the——" she was about to say "*Paternoster*," but she changed it into "the Lord's Prayer."

"And the '*Hail, Mary!*'—I think you have taught her that? for she was teaching it to my little girls the last time she was at our house."

"*Eh, bien!* And what if I did? But it is so bigoted you English are. Why, your own Church says the '*Hail Mary!*'"

"Indeed! I never knew it. It is never used in the

church here, nor at Chalfonts, nor at any of the Luncheon churches."

"Ah, those churches are only half-and-half! They are not true Church of England—not half Catholic; they are little more than Methodist conventicles. I have heard your own priests say so. The true Anglican Church reverences the Blessed Virgin, though not yet has the time come to render her due worship and honour. Very soon all England will say the *Ave Maria*! And for why should you find fault with it, Madame? What is there in it to shock any pious Christian person? 'Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now, and at the hour of our death, Amen.' Is it not all true? Is not Mary blessed among women? If not, why chant your *Magnificat*? Is not Jesus, whom she bore, blessed? Is she not the mother of God?"

"No. Mary was the mother of Christ's human nature only, of that nature which being derived from her, a mortal woman, had to suffer the mortal penalty of death. That she was blessed among women no one disputes, but that she can hear our prayers or help us either in life or in death, I positively deny."

"The Church of England teaches it."

"It does *not*!" exclaimed Mrs. Jelfie, in hot anger; "I know my Prayer-book from end to end, and there is not one prayer in it addressed to Mary or to any other dead person. The Church of England prayers are addressed to God alone, through Jesus Christ our Lord, and I wonder you *dare* to stand there, Mam'selle, and tell such a lie to our clergyman's lady! You are a Papist, that's what *you* are! and the General is not giving you the sack a day too soon. To think of you teaching that innocent child to say the 'Hail, Mary,' and then to go scandalising our *Church*—our beloved, blessed English Church!"

Mademoiselle laughed a little laugh, that gave Mrs. Jelfie "the creeps," as she afterwards affirmed. Then, with a real French shrug, she replied, "Ah, your blessed English Church won't know herself in twenty years to come. Seatondale chapel is not much like what it used

to be, if people tell the truth. It has got on finely since I came to the Hall. As for that *Reformed* Prayer-book, the Church won't stick to that much longer, you'll see."

"It *must*!" replied Mrs. Clifford. "It must defer to the Act of Parliament."

"Bah! but it *will not*. It will care nothing for your Acts of Parliament; but it will take its own way,—*when the right time comes!*"

"The State Church cannot do that!"

"We shall see! we shall see! Besides, she will not always be the State Church. It is absurd that the State should rule the Church;—a pretty Church indeed, to be the servant of the Crown. No! no! the Church will not be in chains always!—wait twenty, thirty, perhaps forty years,—and *then!*"

"From all you say," interrupted Mrs. Clifford, "I perceive that the General does no more than his duty to his child and to his family in dismissing you without notice from his service. It would have been well, indeed, had he decided on your removal several years ago; better still, had you never formed one of this household. I shall report to General Seaton all you have said to me; and now, I will no longer detain you. Mrs. Jeliffe will send you all the assistance you require. You had better leave Farleton by an early afternoon train; the General does not like the horses kept out too late."

"Soh! soh!" said Mademoiselle, with another emphatic shrug, "there is no alternative,—I go! Mistress Jeliffe, I pray you, send to my assistance *la petite Lucie*."

"Lucy is otherwise engaged; but you may have Nancy, who is worth ten of Lucy, when it comes to real work. Or Rhoda, if you like;—she is slow but sure, and always does what she is told."

"Rhoda! I like her not: she is stupid; supremely so! And Nancy, she seems like one who suffers always from *la migraine*. I prefer that little Lucie, who is so bright and obliging, so brisk and so *debonnaire!*"

"And so careless! But Lucy you will not have, Mam'selle! I try to be a mother to the maids; and what you have just said to Mrs. Clifford and to me proves that

you are not fit to be trusted with young people. Lucy has a task of unpicking ready for her in my own room, and she will sit at it under my eye till you are safe out of Seatondale. She don't stir till you've crossed the Brow at Garth Head."

"Then she will not stir, *pauvre petite*, for a very long time!—not till you are tired of her under your eye, Madame Jeliffe! The General may turn me out of his house, but he cannot turn me out of Fellshire. I shall not cross Garth Head to-day, nor yet to-morrow, nor perhaps the day after that! Truly, I know not when."

"You will be foolish if you try to stay at the 'Golden Lion.' And I am sure no one else will receive you, if it is known that you are discharged by General Seaton."

"*Le Lion d'Or*! No, I thank you! Mrs. Fluke's house-keeping would not do for me; I shall go to Malham Tower. Mr. Fabian brought me here, and he must send me away again. *He* knows what I am, and what is my worth, and I shall depend upon him for a situation such as I deserve. I am driven forth when he is from home—that was part of the conspiracy, I suppose. I shall find a refuge with the respectable Mrs. Darcy till Mr. Fabian returns. Want the carriage, do you say? No, indeed! I go forth on foot, and alone; I will not be mocked by your lacqueys. No carriage for poor, persecuted me! a stranger in a strange land, and trodden underfoot by the strangers. I pack *mes malles*—that is, my trunks, and I leave them to be sent for. I shall lock them, and cord them—ay, and *seal* them, I promise you, Madame Jeliffe. No more plots shall be hatched against me; my character shall no further be assailed. I will seal my *baggages*, I tell you, and then it will be impossible to put plate or jewels inside, and charge *me* with the theft. Bah! it is one grand conspiracy to ruin me; but I hold my own—*me*! Adieu, Madame Clifford, and Madame Jeliffe. I wish you both no greater pain than you have given me this day. But I shall not forget you—either of you. Oh, no! you will find that the *pauvre* Annette remembers you always."

As the morning was wearing on, Nancy and Rhoda were both despatched to aid Mademoiselle in her packing, which

promised to be a rather serious undertaking, for she had stores of all sorts—trunks full, and drawers full, and wardrobes full, and cupboards full. Some of it had come with her to Seatondale, the rest had accumulated during her prosperous five years' residence. Mrs. Jeliffe had to hunt out half a dozen tea-chests, and Mr. Viner had to produce a huge packing-case before Mademoiselle's belongings could be accommodated. All, however, was packed at last, and after locking and cording—she used up two new clothes-lines, which the housekeeper willingly ceded—and nailing up, &c., she was as good as her word, and sealed every package with a quaint old impression, of which there was not probably any duplicate.

Then, with a pair of hand-bags and her umbrella, Mademoiselle departed, taking the regular path across the park to Malham Tower, without bidding farewell to any person at the Hall. Mrs. Clifford, at the General's request, had taken Edith and Beatrice to her own home for the day.

But, in spite of all precautions, Mademoiselle had found an opportunity to do her innocent rival, the new governess, a bad turn. Nancy and Rhoda were gone to their dinner, and Mademoiselle was supposed to be eating hers, which was duly served up at the proper time, at the table where she had been mistress so long. Left alone, she did not trouble herself much about the delicate minced veal and mashed potatoes, ready for her immediate consumption, but having first ascertained that the coast was clear, she stole along the deserted corridor, and entered the room which was now Miss Armstrong's. There she looked about her, taking note of all she surveyed. She tried the drawers—they were unlocked, but contained only clothes, and not, as it appeared to Mademoiselle, very handsome clothes. There were no papers of any kind, either written or printed; no stray letter even—nothing, in fact, in the shape of a document, except a dressmaker's bill, which Edith had paid just before leaving Luncester. Mademoiselle, with a grin, put this into her pocket. "The bill might be sent in again some day," she whispered, as she crumpled it up in her skinny brown hands; "who knows? Such things do happen. And then, *ma foi!* where will be the receipt? Mademoiselle Armstrong,—

so ugly a name!—should not leave her things about. I owe her a grudge,—a good many grudges, indeed! What else can I do?"

She essayed to open the dressing-case, and the large travelling trunk, which was pushed away into an alcove; but both were securely locked, and it would be a risk to go and fetch the bunch of keys—some of them very suspicious-looking keys—which she possessed. Was there no other little trick to be played on this detestable heretic, who had hustled her out of her snug, well-lined nest at an hour's notice? She caught sight of a bottle on the chimney-piece—a bottle containing a brown mixture, and labelled, "A dessert spoonful every two hours, when the cough is troublesome. Miss Armstrong." Her face lighted up at the sight, and she seized the bottle and carried it swiftly to her own chamber, the door of which she locked and bolted with a chuckle. The cough mixture was quickly emptied out of the window. Mademoiselle sniffed at the bottle; it had no particular scent. Then she took out from a small chest still unpacked two phials, which by turns she handled and contemplated. One of them she laid down, saying, "No, it would cure her cough—she would 'cough no more;' but neither would she eat, nor drink, nor walk about any more; she would only *sleep*—a long, cold sleep. Ah, it is not safe, it will not do. I may not run the risk." I am forbidden to run any risk. Fair and softly win the day, so I am told, but it is hard to forego revenge when it lies just within one's grasp. I must content myself with the other."

The other was simply a *strong emetic*, the effects of which would continue for hours. With this nice potion, Mademoiselle filled up poor Edith's bottle of cough mixture, and again she chuckled, thinking how dreadfully ill and wretched the new governess would be the first time she took a dose of her cough medicine; then she carried back the bottle to its place in Edith's room, locked up the terrible phials, and coolly ate her dinner, which by this time was quite cold; not that that mattered, she had served out the usurper, though not nearly to the extent she wished. "Still, it is no joke to be as sick as a dog for twelve hours," she said, with yet another chuckle, as



she drained her last glass of good claret. An hour afterwards she was on her way to Malham Tower.

Several hours later, when Edith and her charge had returned from Priests' Croft, and were sitting with the General in his favourite oak parlour, walked in unannounced, the Rev. John Fabian.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### MR. FABIAN IS ASTONISHED.

"Yet we are asked to believe,—though, as Lord Macaulay says, 'Not less in all probability than 100,000 persons have exercised the functions of bishops,'—that the apostles conferred in their life-time the most marvellous powers upon certain successors in their office; that no irregularity has ever vitiated that succession; that century after century the stream of apostolic grace has flowed on unhindered and undefiled through masses of violence and corruption, of fraud and blood; that it is to-day distilled by the hands of a Bishop Colenso or a Wilberforce upon the head of every alumnus from Oxford or St. Bees; and that all other ministers not thus ordained—however eminent their piety and their gifts—are '*unauthorised teachers*' who have 'run without being sent!'"—From *Church Tracts for the Times*, 1869.

FOR the first time since they became friends the General was not glad to see Mr. Fabian. He would certainly have preferred his longer absence from the neighbourhood, although he had remained abroad much longer than was expected—longer even than General Seaton had ventured to hope when he resolved to rid himself of Mademoiselle Annette. Mr. Fabian looked pale and thin and worn; there was an anxious and restless expression on his face, which gave one the idea of his being ill at ease, and—or, was it only fancy?—something like a nervous tremor seemed to agitate his features, as he found himself once more in the familiar oak-parlour, and in the presence of the man he called his dearest friend. He did not appear

surprised at finding a young lady, who seemed tolerably at home, though no young lady had he ever seen in that house before; but he was startled as he perceived what ravages illness had made in the person of the General. "He has had a sharp turn," he said to himself, "and this is the beginning of the end."

"Well, Mr. Fabian, we almost thought you were lost," said General Seaton, stretching out his one serviceable hand. "I began to think I should never see you again—I have only one hand, you perceive. When did you return?"

"I have just arrived from Chalfonts. I came over-sands with Mr. Musgrave, of the Holt Farm, and I have not yet seen Malham Tower. I heard that you had been dangerously ill, and I came here first. I am afraid it has been a very serious affair."

"So serious that I quite believed I was to get my marching orders there and then. However, the Great Commander sees fit to continue me in the service a little longer, though not, as I have reason to believe, for any lengthened period. Allow me to introduce you to Miss Armstrong, the lady who is so good as to undertake the education of my little girl."

Had a thunderbolt fallen at the feet of Mr. Fabian he could scarcely have been more surprised; it did not, however, follow that he permitted that surprise to appear; on the contrary, he bowed pleasantly to Edith, and made a courteous remark on his friend's good fortune in securing so desirable an inmate. No one would have supposed that he regarded her presence there much as an experienced chess-player regards the loss of his queen when he thought himself almost in a position to give checkmate to his adversary. The General had made a most unexpected move that promised to alter all the tactics of the game which was being played out at Seatondale. For who was Edith, and whence came she, and what were her religious proclivities? And had he not heard her name before? He was tolerably certain that he had, though when or where he could not at first remember. And if this beautiful young lady ruled the roast how would it fare with Mademoiselle, his own trusty agent and accomplice?

He looked as he felt, worried and tired. He had been sorely troubled of late, for he had enemies, and powerful enemies too, in high places. And they were all the more to be dreaded because they were covert and undeclared foes, and because, keen and far-seeing and experienced in tactics as he was, he could not discover who the people were who continually circumvented him and brought him to disrepute in head-quarters. Only this he knew, that he was suspected of—he scarcely knew what, and that he was most undeservedly blamed on account of the tardy progress he was making with regard to Seatondale. He had been summoned—not to Brussels, as was commonly supposed, although he had really gone there in the first instance—but to *Rome*, there to report himself at the supreme tribunal. It was urged against him that he had spent vast sums of money, that for six years and more he had followed, unchecked, his own devices, without even the smallest results—without even so much as one conversion to the faith. And now, returning to the one spot on earth where he felt certain of finding peace and rest after the strife and agitation of the last few weeks, there was this new and unlooked-for change, which he regarded, and with reason, as a most untoward circumstance, which would require to be met by increased vigilance and most consummate caution. He, too, felt that one false step might be the ruin of his cause.

“Why, you look as if you had been an invalid,” said the General, kindly, as presently he noted his friend’s altered countenance. “What have you been doing with yourself since you left Seatondale?”

“I have had a good deal of vexatious business on hand,” he returned. “I ought not to have let it vex me, perhaps, but it did. My family is unfortunately mixed up with these political changes which have lately overswept the Continent, and a great deal of property has been lost, and much more endangered.”

“Take my advice, and have nothing to do with Continental securities. Dear me! what didn’t I lose myself in Spanish Bonds, thirty years ago. Get some solid English investments—there are plenty to be had. *My* man of business will tell you all about it, and you may trust him.”

"Thank you, but I hope matters are a little mended. only I have had a harassing time, and I am not very well, I am right glad to be at home again."

"Well, sit down; you need not go on to Malham to-night. I have a good deal to say to you."

"I will sit down, but I should prefer to finish my journey before I sleep, thank you. Yes! Madeira; the green seal, too! I cannot resist that. No, not any supper. I dined at Chalfonts. Mrs. Drewitt gave me sumptuous fare. But I must have a word or two with my pet before she goes. Beatrice, what do you think I have brought you?"

"*Bonbons*," said Beatrice, readily. Mr. Fabian always did bring her the most beautiful and delicious French *bonbons*, in the most wonderful boxes.

"*Bonbons*, of course," he replied, "for I was several days in Paris; but not *bonbons* alone. I have brought you several dolls, one a perfect beauty, a court lady in velvet, and satin, and pearls; one a baby in long clothes, so much like a real baby that I am afraid it will cry and want to be fed and rocked! one a *bonne* in a white cap—a Normandy cap, you know; and one a charming nun!"

"Oh, let me have them!" cried Miss Beatrice. "I shall like the baby doll best, I know. I shall make believe it is a real live baby, and I am its mamma. And it shall have a grand christening, for it *must* have a name."

"I am sorry to say the dolls have gone on to the Tower with the rest of my luggage. But you can have them early to-morrow morning; ask Mademoiselle to walk over with you."

"Mademoiselle's gone," said Beatrice, shaking her head. "She is gone, is she not, papa? I have got a real proper governess now, because I am growing up."

"Gone! actually gone!" said Mr. Fabian, looking displeased. "How is that? has she failed in her duty?"

"I will explain to you. Miss Armstrong, will you take charge of Beatrice, if you please? it is past her bed-time, I am afraid."

And Edith, only too glad to get her dismissal, went away with her pupil to their own apartments. Left alone

with Mr. Fabian, the General lost no time in fencing the subject, but plunged into it immediately.

"Yes! Mademoiselle Annette is gone. And, Fabian, I heartily wish she had gone a year ago; or, better still, that she had never come here."

"You alarm me, especially as I was the means of introducing her to your household. She appeared to me a most valuable servant."

"No doubt! She knew a thing or two; she would have been none the worse for knowing a little less, I fancy. Well! I have been uneasy about her—on the child's account, you know—for some time. She has taught Beatrice no end of Popish nonsense. Bless you! the little monkey has made a Virgin Mary of one of her wax dollies! I caught her myself crowning it with flowers, and hanging a string of beads round its neck; and she says the *Hail Mary* as fast as can be. I told Clifford to examine her, and he declares she has got into her head a perfect *hash* of English Episcopalianism and rank Romanism, and she don't know which is which!"

Mademoiselle, then, had done her work well. Things were exactly as they should be; this "hash" was just the very thing to be desired, for Fabian knew quite well that the predominating flavours would all be of Rome. But apparently the *gouvernante* had been in too great a hurry, and had not exercised that caution for which she was usually accredited. She had gone a little too fast—that was all; there was no such great mischief done, Mr. Fabian hoped.

"I should not have thought it," was his quiet reply; "I mean I should have thought Mademoiselle would be more prudent, more conscientious. Only, General, if you trusted to Clifford, he may have led you astray; for you know he is not so advanced a thinker as we ourselves are. He is no true Anglican; his wife keeps him back, and every now and then he takes a turn, and espies Popery in every nook and corner of the National Church, as now awakened to her high prerogative and her awful responsibilities. He says he has gone—Romeward, of course—further than he meant to go, and he won't take another step in that direction."

"No more will I, God helping me!" exclaimed the General. "Fabian, I have been very near my end since I saw you last; I have spent hours alone with God, and He has shown me the great error into which of late years I—and I think *you*—have fallen. I have surrendered all for which, a little while ago, I would have struggled manfully—all this *Churchism*, I don't know what else to call it—all this ceremonial, this continual saying of prayers, this ritualism, this salvation by proxy, it seems to me nothing else—I have renounced it all. I come to Jesus Christ a poor, woful sinner, and I say to Him, 'Lord, save me, or I perish.' This Anglicanism, which I believed to be simple Church of Englandism, comes between my soul and God; and, therefore, I will have no more of it. I come back to the simplicity of the Gospel. If I were to live for twenty years—I do not think I shall live for twenty months—I should go on saying my prayers in Church of England fashion, but I should not look to any Church to save me, and I should acknowledge as my brother the poorest Methodist Ranter who acknowledged my Master, and in his own way tried to serve Him and to glorify His name."

"There you are in error. Methodists, of whatever species, are *schismatics*! And schismatics are *heretics*; and as such to be condemned. Ah, my friend, what did the Lord establish a Church for—a Church of His own,—if all sorts of sects and rash interlopers are to be tolerated side by side with His apostles?"

"But what if the people you call interlopers are His apostles? And what if many of the robed and consecrated clergy of the Establishment *are not*? Ah! this figment, that you call 'apostolical succession,' is utter rubbish—one's common sense tells one so. No laying on of hands can confer such gifts as the clergy claim;—God by His Spirit makes apostles to-day, as He did eighteen centuries ago. All are apostles who teach and preach God's truth. Nay, I am sure of it! God has shown it to me; and no words of yours can shake my soul's conviction."

"And God forbid that I should seek to shake any conviction which He has implanted. But, my dear General, remember that Satan himself can wear the livery of the

King of kings; Satan can and does for his own ends assume the semblance of an angel of light."

"I do remember it. Fabian! these men who say they can forgive sins, and turn a bit of bread into the veritable flesh of Jesus Christ, are those who wear unlawfully the livery of the King of kings. You and I talked one day, in the spring—don't you remember?—about the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and you believed in it, and almost won me over to share in your belief. But now, with all my strength, I disavow it. Concede that dogma, and you make the Church of these realms the Church of Rome. Fabian, do I astonish you?"

"You do, indeed. If there was any man in England to whom I supposed I could point as a sound orthodox Churchman, of advanced Anglican views, it was to you, General Seaton! You speak now like—well, I don't mean to insult you, but truth is truth—like a mere *Dissenter*."

"I should not feel insulted if you called me a Dissenter, though I am not, and never can be one—I *think*. I am too old to change; I love my mother Church, the plain, old-fashioned Church of England; but I love not this meretricious, bedizened, loud-talking dame who wants to be my stepmother! I am too old to change, I say, and yet, if the hand of death were not upon me, I might change; for if one's mother is unfaithful to her marriage vows, one cannot pay her more filial reverence. I shall never leave my Church, but my Church is leaving me—I see that plainly."

"My friend, my dear friend, who has been thus poisoning your mind and filling your heart with foul suggestions?"

"No one. What you call poison is bread, what you term foul suggestions are blessed teachings. Fabian, I cannot convince you, I know, but there is nothing too hard for God. He may teach you yet—I think He will. Now tell me, *What are you?* and what is the woman who calls herself Mademoiselle Annette?"

Fabian loathed himself as he replied, without any seeming hesitation, "I am a clergyman of the Church of England—what else should I be?"

"What else, indeed! And that you are or were what you claim to be, outwardly at least, I cannot doubt, for there is your name in the *Olergy List*. But it strikes me, John Fabian, that you have tampered with that false harlot, Rome, till she has caught you in her meshes, and forbidden you to reveal the fact of your captivity. Tell me, I adjure you, as in God's presence, are you still faithful to your ordination vows, or *are you a priest of Rome?* You will not deceive me, your friend and brother."

It was with an almost supernatural effort that Fabian replied, "God is my witness, I am in heart and soul a faithful son of that Church in which I received holy orders."

"And that Church was the Church of England as by law established."

"That Church was the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, which you and I both acknowledge every time we repeat the Nicene Creed. I will not call myself a *Protestant*—I was never a Protestant—and I do not believe in the so-called Reformation. I am of the Anglo-Catholic Church; I cannot say more."

"That is enough. Forgive me, but I had some strange notions in my head. I had heard of Jesuits in houses—Jesuits who would have deceived the saints themselves—Jesuits who worked misery and anguish and woe and shame wherever they entered! And—I suppose it was my illness—I thought what if such a person had gained my heart and my confidence, and went in and out among us as a wolf in sheep's clothing! And if it were so, what would ensue when the Lord called me to Himself? Can you forgive me, my friend?"

"With all my heart! It was your disordered brain, your weakened intellect, not yourself, that was false to me. And so you thought I was a Jesuit?"

"I did at times, I own. The idea haunted me, and I could not get rid of it. And then Mademoiselle was your pupil—your *protégée*, rather; and I feel quite certain *she* is a member of the Church of Rome."

"I cannot answer for Mademoiselle Annette. That she lately had views tending Romewards, I cannot altogether deny; but still I thought they might be only the advanced



expression of an earnest Anglicanism. Has she been attending the chapel at St. Ulpha's?"

"Oh dear, no! She has attended our own place here, chiefly; and she has gone to your private chapel at Malham, whenever she could contrive it. There has been no profession of Romanism—or I should have known what to do. No Papist lives under my roof."

"What makes you think Mademoiselle is a Catholic?"

"Fifty things! her craft and subtlety; her insidious indoctrination of her pupil; her contempt for the simple services of the English faith, and, above all, something which occurred to-day. Mrs. Clifford very properly reproved her for exclaiming in her light French way, '*mon Dieu*,' and she assured her that all such irreverence was a breach of the third commandment. Now, Mademoiselle did not know the commandments as we of the English Church know them. Even Anglicans, however advanced, hold to the Decalogue, as commonly received in this country by Christians of all denominations,—the Romanists only excepted. They—for reasons very evident—do away with the *Second Commandment* entirely: how they dare to commit so flagrant a piece of effrontery I never could imagine! But for the Church of Rome to publish as Divine a commandment which expressly forbids any sort of worship of any sort of graven image would be purely suicidal. Well! Mademoiselle Annette actually supposed she was accused of desecration of the Sabbath. The Romanists' third commandment, which is our *fourth*, is clearly hers; she evidently takes them in the order which a Romanist does, omitting the second *in toto*, and splitting up the tenth to make up the number, so that the ninth is really a repetition of the seventh—though, by the way, I suppose it would be the *sixth*, according to Mademoiselle. Now, all unwittingly, Mademoiselle revealed a *secret* when she stumbled over the Decalogue."

"You forget her French training; she was brought up nominally in the Catholic faith, I believe, and I dare say learned the orthodox catechism of that creed. But she ought to know better. Even if she had come here quite ignorant of the English ritual, she might have learned ere

this how the commandments follow each other. She hears them at least once a week in church."

"Quite true. But you may depend upon it, Mademoiselle Annette ignores the second commandment as completely as I ignore the Pope's last decretal or Bull. However, she is gone."

"Excuse me; but is it not rather sharp practice to send a woman away on mere conjecture? Would it not have been more generous—I will not say more just—to give her the opportunity of explaining herself? Is it fair to strike at people from behind?"

"I don't know what you mean by striking at people from behind. There has been no unfairness in this matter. I am master of this house, and I am Beatrice's father and only parent, and if I take exception to certain words and deeds of one of my servants, am I not justified in forthwith dismissing her, especially if, as in this case, her faults are such as seriously to tend to my child's injury?"

"But there it is I think you are to blame. Of course, I do not know what has happened in my absence, but it seems to me that poor Mademoiselle is condemned on most unsatisfactory premises—without judge or jury, in fact."

"I am judge in my own house," replied the General stiffly. "As for jury, all the servants, with scarcely an exception, had their suspicions of Mademoiselle. Fabian, believe me, that woman is fooling you! She is a cheat, for she calls herself an Anglo-Catholic, and she is a *Roman* Catholic—not that there is a very wide difference between the two; but for myself I prefer an open enemy to a false friend. I hate Judases!"

"When did Mademoiselle go, and whither is she gone?"

"She went this afternoon, and you will find her safe with your housekeeper at Malham Tower. I paid her her salary up to the month's end, and in lieu of notice what she would have received had she remained here another year. I desired that the carriage should be ready to take her to Farleton station, imagining that she would go back to Lunechester, whence she came, but she chose rather to go to Malham Tower, and await your return. So you may

cross-question her as much as you will, and if you do not come to our conclusions I shall be astonished."

"Who dismissed her, may I ask?"

"Mrs. Clifford and Jeliffe, between them. I left it to them, for I would not trust myself to say what I thought to the woman herself. Besides, Fabian—I don't know what we have all been thinking of—it is high time that a mere *gouvernante*, or upper nurse, should be replaced by an efficient and accomplished governess. Only a lady can educate a lady—you surely agree with me; and Mademoiselle Annette, though a genteel sort of person, is not a gentlewoman. It is scarcely correct that Miss Seaton should be entrusted to the care of an ex-milliner."

"The ex-milliner is undoubtedly of most respectable family."

"Very likely. But she is not therefore qualified to bring up a young lady of birth and fortune. As a milliner she was to be respected; as a person undertaking what she is quite incompetent to perform, she is, let us say, *not trustworthy*. I don't condemn any person, whether woman or man, who honestly follows an honest trade, but is it in the fitness of things that a person whose educational advantages have been limited, extremely limited I should say, and a person also unaccustomed to the usages of society as they exist in the upper ranks, should be permitted to form the mind and manners of a girl in Beatrice's station?"

"I do not say it is; I was thinking the same thing myself, just before I left Malham. I, too, felt that the time had arrived when the dear child should enjoy the advantages of education and the companionship of an educated gentlewoman. My only objection is, that the change has been made with so much abruptness, and without any reference to the feelings of poor Mademoiselle, who, whatever be her faults and shortcomings, is certainly devotedly attached to Beatrice. However, you are, as you say, master in your own house, and though I take a friend's privilege of speaking frankly, I should be extremely sorry to appear impertinent. I have no further remark to make on this subject, except to say that I think Mademoiselle took a liberty in removing herself without invitation to

Malham. Of course, you know all about Miss Armstrong and her antecedents?"

"I know everything that is to be known, which is not much. Mrs. Clifford vouches for her, and she has, besides, excellent testimonials. She is a relation of Lady Sophia Saville, she is an Armstrong of Elderslie, as good blood as one could wish, and I had resolved that I would have no one but a born gentlewoman about the child. She is young, too,—Mademoiselle was quite too old—and, above all, I am sure of her Protestantism. She is as anti-Roman as I could desire; she is a Presbyterian."

"Which is tantamount to being a Dissenter," replied Mr. Fabian, so thunderstruck, so filled with consternation, that he could not say another word. Things had indeed taken a strange and utterly unexpected turn during his absence. His superiors might rue the day when they summoned him to hear their unjust reproaches, and to listen to their counsels.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### MR. FABIAN AT HOME.

"Tell me a thing she cannot dress—  
Soups, hashes, pickles, puddings, pies;  
Nought comes amiss—she is so wise."

MADemoiselle was pouring out her grievances to Mother Bridget, *alias* Mrs. Darcy, while Mr. Fabian listened to the strange story of her sudden dismissal at the Hall.

And the lady of Malham Tower, so far from sympathising with the luckless *gouvernante*, only blamed her for having allowed matters to come to a crisis before her director's return.

"A pretty kettle of fish you've made of it!" said Mother Bridget, as she applied herself to narrowing in the foot of

the woollen stocking she was knitting. "And I wonder what his Reverence will say when he hears of your stupid mismanagement!"

"Mismanagement! a kettle of fishes! do you say?" screamed Mademoiselle. "I managed beautifully—yes, *beautifully*, I tell you! As for fishes, there was none; and often I ate meat on fast-days to avoid suspicion when the eyes of that abominable Madame Jeliffe were upon me! I have worked with all my body, and with all my soul, and with all my brains, and if things have gone wrong it was no fault of mine. There was a conspiracy—a most vile, wicked conspiracy against me, and that so poor, shaky old General has been the victim of designing persons, who had their own ends in view when they schemed to get me sent away."

"But *why* were you sent away?" asked Mother Bridget, when she had counted her stitches very carefully. "I suppose there was some plausible reason assigned, was there not?"

"They charged me with being what I am—a Catholic and a *Jesuit*!"

"And you were not such a fool as to admit the truth of their suspicions, I hope?"

"*Ma foi*! not I! It is good to tell lies to the heretics. No, no! I vowed I was only what they call 'an advanced Anglican'! Oh, the idiots! If it had not been for the 'Anglicanism,' though—base mockery as it is, neither fish, nor flesh, nor fowl, nor yet good red-herring!—I could never have done what I have done. The leetle Mees will never be a good, sound Protestant—no, *nevaire*! She knows the *Ave*, and some very nice little bits of rosaries and litanies, and I have taught her to make the sign of the cross, and many other things, which she, *pauvre petite*, will never forget, and which she does not know are not part and parcel of her own religion."

"All very well; but it strikes me, Sister Augustine, you have been going rather too fast. The child—such a baby as she is—would be sure to let out something or other, and then the General would be on the alert, and he would question her; and that meddling Mrs. Clifford and her fool of a husband would put their fingers into the pie,

and the result would naturally be your summary dismissal. What are you going to do now?"

"Nothing; nothing at all! I have rowed hard against the stream, but the wind and the tide have been too strong for me, and now I will rest on my oars, and wait to see what help the blessed Heaven will afford."

"If you wait till Heaven interferes for you, I am afraid you will have to wait a weary time. But while you are waiting what will you do, and where will you bestow yourself?"

"I shall stay *here*!" and Mademoiselle planted herself firmly heel and toe upon the spot, as if she were resolved not to budge an inch. "I shall stay till Father Fabian comes home; I will hear what he shall say—something will have to be done. Our little lady must not be left to the sole charge of heretics. Perhaps the new governess will not suit? Perhaps the child will pine for her faithful old Annette? Eh! I may yet return to the Hall; but, in any case, *I stay here now, Mother Bridget.*"

"You cannot stay if I do not permit you. However, for the present, at least, I think you had better remain. I must know into what sort of scrape you have plunged us, and, if need be, I will see Father Sullivan, at St. Ulpha's. Oh, dear, dear! you have been very clumsy, I am afraid."

Now, clumsiness was what, above all things, Mademoiselle abhorred—it was to her French soul the sin of sins; into a lower deep it was scarcely possible to descend—and her indignation broke forth without restraint, at the stinging accusation. "Clumsy!"—she pronounced it *Olumpsee*, with a very strong accent on the last syllable—"clumpsee, indeed! What next? The holy saints grant me patience. I, clumpsee! The English are always clumpsee, and the Irish often, and the Scotch are worse than clumpsee, but nevaire,—no, nevaire—was there a clumpsee Frenchwoman! Oh, *mon Dieu*!"

And not all irreverently, Mademoiselle lifted her eyes and hands, and appealed to the Almighty, who, knowing all things, must certainly know that such an anomaly as a clumsy Frenchwoman never had, or could have, actual existence.

"If there is one thing in the world that I am *not*," she continued, emphatically, "it is *that*. I could no more be clumpsee, Mother Bridget, than you could tell the truth, which, of course, you would be ashamed to tell, for it is only the unbeciles, the soft-brained ones who concern themselves about so silly a bagatelle as the truth. To *cleverly* lie is a grand accomplishment; of course, any fool can tell a common lie, but to lie superbly, magnificently, is not one ordinary talent. For you, Mother Bridget, you lie with genius, and with—effrontery. *N'est-ce-pas ?*" To which equivocal compliment it was difficult to reply; therefore Mrs. Darcy, being prudent above her fellows, and, moreover, gifted with the rare virtue of being able to restrain her tongue when expedient, counted her stitches three times over, and then in silence unravelled at least half a dozen rows of knitting.

She let Mademoiselle rave on sometimes in French and sometimes in English, while she calmly counted and recounted, and clicked her bright steel pins, pitying the unfortunate woman who so sadly lacked self-control, and therefore showed the cards she had in hand too plainly.

How long Mother Bridget would have maintained her exasperating reserve, and how long Sister Augustine would have stormed, it is impossible to say; happily for both, the sudden clang of the postern-gate bell, ringing its well-known signal, silenced the one lady, and caused the other to drop her stitches in real earnest.

"Holy Saints!" exclaimed Mother Bridget, "but that is the holy Father's ring! Who would have thought of seeing him at this time of night!"

"Our Lady be praised, it is—it is *he*!" cried Sister Augustine. "Now shall I be defended from my calumniators."

"Now you will get closely questioned, and sharply reprimanded," retorted the Mother, as she took a heavy key from her hand-basket, and went out into the darkness. And in another minute Father Fabian was in the room, shaking the drops of rain from his overcoat—for he had been overtaken by a thunder-shower, sweeping up suddenly from the sea.

"Good evening! good evening!" he said politely. "I

was prepared to meet you here, Sister Augustine, for I paid the General a visit as I came along. How very ill he looks ! ”

“ He is very bad indeed ; he will die before long ! There is much to be done at Seaton, and little time to do it in. I have been shamefully ill-treated. ”

“ Shamefully ill-treated ? ”

“ *Mon Dieu !*—yes ! Sent away like a common thief at a moment’s notice, and for no fault of mine, except that I did do my duty quite too well ! ”

“ That is just it. What is done *too* well is as unacceptable as what is done too ill. In all these things the *juste milieu*, the careful medium, must be observed. A little discretion is worth a great deal of genius, and tact is often to be preferred to talent. However, we will not talk about our grievances to-night. I want some supper ; I refused the General’s hospitality, and it is some hours since I dined. What have you to give me, Mrs. Darcy ? ”

And here I must remark that Mr. Fabian always called his housekeeper “ Mrs. Darcy,” and he generally ignored the appellation of “ Sister Augustine,” because, as he shrewdly observed, the most careful tongue might trip, and the best memory was subject to accidental lapses, and there was a sort of magic in habit which no one could invariably resist. It was therefore expedient that, except upon very particular occasions, they should call each other, even in private, by their secular names. Very wise and prudent was the Rev. John Fabian.

Mrs. Darcy regretted that her larder was but indifferently supplied, to-morrow being a *jour maigre* ; still she hoped something might be tossed up worthy of his Reverence’s attention. What did he say to a tender cutlet, with mushrooms and a bottle of *Vin de Barsac* ?

“ Have you no cold meat ?—nothing in cut ? ” asked Mr. Fabian. “ I should like to sup immediately and go to bed ; I am so thoroughly tired out. ”

“ There is some cold fat mutton,” replied Mrs. Darcy ; “ but it was cooked the day before yesterday, and I cannot recommend it. ”

“ Nevertheless, I will be content with it, I think ; and I



will take some brandy-and-water. One cannot fancy *Vin de Barsac* with fat cold mutton."

"No, indeed!" said Mrs. Darcy, with a grimace, at the same time thinking "he must be terribly put out to care so little about his supper. He only eats to sustain nature, that is evident." But she resolved that the mutton, which was *very* fat and *very* coarse, should be supplemented by a dainty omelette, which no one knew better than herself how to prepare speedily and well. Mrs. Darcy's omelettes were always a triumph of culinary skill. Her fish-omelettes on fast-days were real tit-bits for epicures; and being a thrifty, thoughtful housewife, she was never at any time short of material for the most appetising of little *plats*. Mr. Buckmaster himself must have bowed the knee to the mistress of Malham Tower, and Soyer, could he have taken "pot-luck" with her occasionally, must have been ravished with delight. She was never without good "stock" in the house; the *pot-au-feu* was an abiding institution; she was never in extremity for spices, groceries, or condiments; she had "flavourings" at discretion, and all kinds of savoury herbs and vegetables ready to hand whenever she required them. The General prided himself on his table; but he was fain to confess that his Mrs. Jelffe, aided by an expensive cook, was not fit to hold the candle to Mr. Fabian's Mrs. Darcy, who only required the help of a hard-working scullerymaid. There were two things to which Mrs. Darcy devoted herself, heart and soul—two things which were her "ruling passion," and would doubtless be paramount to the last—and they were the interests of the Romish Church, and *cooking*! Which came first it would be difficult to decide; she loved her Church and she loved the culinary art: and then, it was so sweet to find how the latter ministered to the former's comfort and well-being.

Mr. Fabian beckoned Mrs. Darcy aside. "Send off that plague of a woman to bed," said he, "and let the servants get away to their own quarters; it is so cold and miserable, that I should like to have my supper here; I suppose there is no fire above?"

"Certainly not," she replied; "you return unexpectedly, and we are only in August. Come back in a quarter of an hour, and you will find the coast clear. The servants are

already in bed ; I shall only have to deal with Sister Augustine, and I can manage her."

"Call her Mademoiselle Annette ; if her religious name popped out unadvisedly, much mischief might ensue, and there is mischief enough already afloat ; and in managing her you may as well stroke her the right way ; wear a velvet glove over the steel gauntlet. The grip is none the harder, that the touch is soft."

"You are right ; I will practise discretion ; but I do *hate* Mademoiselle Annette, *alias* Madame Piquot, *alias* Sister Augustine !" And Mrs. Darcy spoke with so much energy, that for once, at least, her sincerity was self-evident.

"No doubt," laughed Mr. Fabian. "Let women alone for hating each other to the death ! Only let your hatred be a mere sentiment. I like a woman to be practical, but not in such a case ; hatred, reduced to practice, is apt to prove inconvenient to the hater, and to all with whom she is connected."

"To say nothing of the *hated* !" said Mrs. Darcy, with her curious smile. "But rest content ; I will do Annette no damage ; I will only try her temper, and wound her feelings, according to her provocations."

"A very unchristian resolve," replied Mr. Fabian, gravely, as he took his candle, and went up the winding stair. Mrs. Darcy only chuckled, and drove off Mademoiselle in double-quick time.

"I will not go to my bed ! me,—I am not sleepy at all," she objected, like a spoiled child, who will never own to being tired, even though his eyelids droop, and Somnus presses sore upon him. But Mrs. Darcy gave her to understand that she had no choice ; what she was bidden that she must do, and she should not have come to Malham Tower if she were not prepared to obey the powers that be.

"Ah ! I know ! I know !" returned Mademoiselle, nodding her head, and shaking her false curls ; "you want to have a private confabulation with Father Fabian ; you are going to talk, you two, and you will tell him that I am *clumpsee* ! You will say all manner of evil about me—poor me, who am to be offered up as a burnt sacrifice if things do go wrong."

"Will you go to bed, or will you go back this instant to the Hall?" said Mrs. Darcy, sternly. "Here is your candle—you know your room,—and here is what you don't deserve, a glass of steaming hot whisky-and-water, strong and sweet. Now, be off; I want to be busy. And mark me, Annette, if you leave your room, once you are in it, it will be the worse for you. Good night; all holy saints and angels guard you."

And, consoled by the fragrant scent of the steaming Glenlivat, Mademoiselle retired, observing, however, that she would infinitely have preferred a *tisane* of orange flowers, or a little glass of *eau sucrée* just flavoured with *parfait amour*. Mrs. Darcy, who had lost no time in whisking the eggs for her omelette, laughed to herself as the tapping of Mademoiselle's high-heeled boots died away in the distance. "She will sleep well enough, though she'll have a headache in the morning. I have given her the 'cordial' Glenlivat, and she will hardly get her clothes off before she will begin to nod. I think I will just turn the key in the turret door, though; 'safe bind, safe bind'—my mother taught me that, and she was a woman of judgment."

In a few minutes the omelette, exquisitely flavoured, was ready; the kettle boiled; a snow-white damask cloth was spread; a basin of fine lump sugar, and a lemon, with a silver knife placed suggestively near it, graced the board, as did also a massive, antique silver spirit-stand, well supplied; a pat of delicious butter, a little crisp loaf of that day's baking, some potted char, a *compote* of greengages, and the remains of a cold grouse pie. The mutton in the background *till required*.

In a few minutes came down the master of the feast, in a loose, but decidedly clerical-looking dressing-gown. By this time the omelette was on the table, the fire burned brightly, two or three fresh peats having been thrown on, and the hearth swept. Mrs. Darcy knew what a great many more women might be the better and the happier for knowing, that an untidy hearth goes a great way to make a man ill-tempered. Mr. Fabian's slippers were warming ready for his feet, the table was drawn up near the fire, and the embossed leather screen folded so as to

shut out all draughts, and give an additional air of snugness to the room. Outside the wind roared and the thunder rolled, and ever and anon great sweeps of rain broke on the window panes. Mr. Fabian slipped his feet, warmed his hands at the cheering blaze, and then turned to the table. "*That does not look like cold mutton!*" he said archly, as Mrs. Darcy removed the shining cover.

"The mutton is on the side-table, if you wish it; but I should not eat it myself, except for mortification; and I advise you to try this savoury omelette, and the grouse-pie, though there is not much of it, is toothsome. You look as if you had not sat down to a well-spread table since you went away. They keep too many fast-days where you have been, I fear—too many, that is, for one who, like yourself, is stronger in the spirit than in the flesh."

"I have had a woful time of it, Athanasia."

"Eat your supper first, and tell me afterwards. Let me mix your toddy—brandy or whisky?"

"Whisky, I think. Oh, what a comfort it is to be at home! Though how long it may continue to be home, the saints only know."

The omelette was finished before Mrs. Darcy would permit anything like conversation; but she could not induce her master to try anything else upon the table. They turned their chairs to the fire, drew the screen closer, and Mrs. Darcy being pressed, mixed for herself a nice warm glass of toddy. "Now, then," said she, "tell me all about it. Where have you been, and what have you been doing?"

"I have been in Rome and elsewhere. I went from here to Brussels, and thence to Louvain, as you know. At Louvain I opened the sealed orders which I received in London."

"To think you have been in Rome of all places! and I vexing myself to death to know where you were! Why, only to-day I wrote four letters to you, addressed to different towns where I thought you might possibly be."

"You wrote four letters to me—that was dangerous!"

"Not as I wrote them; I took care that there should be nothing in any way compromising. I simply said that your presence was needed at Malham Tower, and that General Seaton had had a stroke."

"I had no idea of remaining absent so long. What is all this coil about Annette?"

"She has exceeded orders, that is all; and things have gone contrary, as they will sometimes, even under the best management. But I would not, for a thousand pounds, that you should have been away during the General's illness."

"It was a most fatal mischance, and those must bear the blame who were the cause of my detention. Blame, however, is seldom justly appointed. Whatever goes wrong will be laid to my charge. Athanasia, I have enemies, and I shall be superseded here, or, what is equally to be deprecated, be saddled with a professed subordinate, who will really be my superior."

"What is urged against you?"

"That I have *done* nothing! That Seatondale is no nearer being converted than when I first undertook the mission six years ago."

"Fools! Because there are no apparent ripe fruits, no obvious, glaring success, they think that nothing is gained. Why! the entire district is indoctrinated. Under the guise of Anglicanism you have changed the whole aspect of religious worship; you have established this place; you have instilled the very spirit of Rome into the minds of those you have gathered about you; you have prepared the way for mighty conquests. What more could be demanded or expected?"

"Some people are like children, pulling up the plants they have sown, because they do not grow fast enough. But that is not the true cause of the annoyance. There are those about his Holiness who wish me evil, and they will work me evil if they can."

"But they must not, shall not! We will be too strong, too clever for them. Are you sure of Damiano?"

"Sure of him as regards fealty to myself? No, I am not. He is faithful to the Church according to his lights, and he has but to obey. By the bye, where is he? I sent him on with my baggage."

"I have not seen him, but he may have gone to the school-house. Now, what is our next move?"

"I cannot tell you. I cannot see my way before me."

Remember, I had no idea that Mademoiselle was in any danger of being dismissed. I knew that in course of time she must be supplanted, that the heiress must be properly educated; but I had very good reasons for believing that no change would be made till Beatrice was full seven years old. The Abbess of St. Werburgh's had it in charge to provide a suitable and confidential governess, by next spring."

"General Seaton will not be here next spring; he is dying fast, and his friends know it. Is his *will* all safe?"

"It was when I went away on this ill-fated journey. I seem to have lost my end of the clue."

"Never mind, you will find it again. You must make yourself more necessary than ever to the General. You must be left *sole* guardian of the child, and, if possible, trustee and executor. I suppose there is no clause about the little girl being brought up a *Protestant*?"

"There was not two months ago; but who knows what Mrs. Clifford has done with the coast clear to herself? And this new governess, unless she can be gained over or suppressed, will be a terrible thorn in our sides."

"Have you seen her?"

"Yes, and a more beautiful young woman I never beheld, and as sensible as beautiful. If she were only a pretty fool, I could do as I liked with her. But she is one of those rare characters, uniting softness and strength, wit and wisdom, gentleness and firmness; I saw it in her face. And I am sure I have heard her name before."

"If she do not serve our purpose, she must be got rid of at any cost. There may be something wrong about her antecedents."

"I wish there may be."

"There will be, if we search carefully into her history. What shall we do with Mademoiselle Annette?"

"Do with her? Send her to a convent of the most strictly enclosed order, where, as a lay sister, she may do menial service for the rest of her natural life."

At last this strange pair, whom the world called master and servant, separated. The wind howled, the waves in

the estuary roared, the thunder pealed, and with the grey dawn came such torrents of rain, that every little mountain streamlet became a raging watercourse. Neither Mr. Fabian nor Mrs. Darcy slept. As for Mademoiselle, she never woke the whole night through.

Quite late that night, Mrs. Jeliffe went into Edith's room, asking her if she had any good cough lozenges, "for," said she, "I have caught a wretched cold, and it is on my chest; I put my feet in mustard and water last night, and I wore a flannel nightcap, and I drank scalding hot treacle-posset the last thing, and I got no rest, and I know I shall be no better off to-night. Directly I lie down the cough begins—hack, hack, till I am ready to die; only I cannot take liquorice."

"I have no lozenges," Edith replied, "but I have an excellent cough-mixture; it is not nice, but it is very good. Last winter, and again in the early spring, I had a troublesome cough, and this medicine was recommended. I have found it excellent; I don't say it would really *cure* a bad cough, but it soothes the irritation of the lungs and throat, and it is perfectly safe. I had this bottle made up when I came here. Take a teaspoonful in a little water, and a second, if required, in an hour's time; it will be sure to give you ease."

And, with many thanks, Mrs. Jeliffe said "Good night," taking with her, not,—as she and Edith supposed—the cough-mixture, but the powerful emetic substituted by Mademoiselle Annette!

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

## ANNETTE HAS HER REVENGE.

“Fillet of a fenny stake,  
In the cauldron boil and bake;  
Eye of newt, and toe of frog,  
Wool of bat, and tongue of dog,  
Adder’s fork, and blind-worm’s sting,  
Lizard’s leg, and owlet’s wing,  
For a charm of powerful trouble;  
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.”

THE next morning Mrs. Jeliffe did not appear, and the girl who waited upon her reported her too ill to leave her bed. “Is her cough worse?” asked Edith, when she received the information. Nancy did not know; it was not the cough at all, she thought—the housekeeper had been violently sick all night, and she said something about Miss Armstrong’s medicine disagreeing with her.

“It could not be the cough-mixture,” replied Edith, “for it is so mild, and does not contain one harmful ingredient. I am quite sure about it, because I have the prescription, which is that of an eminent physician. I have taken it repeatedly, and it never caused nausea. When did she begin to be ill?”

“About an hour after she took the mixture, perhaps a little less. She did not call me till three o’clock this morning, and then she gave me the keys and told me to fetch her some brandy, for she felt as if she should die. I gave her some cold brandy and water at once, but she could not keep it down, and then I tried the brandy neat, but it was of no use. I never in my life saw anybody like it on dry land. No sea-sickness could be worse. I wish you would go and see her, ma’am, for I think Dr. Wilson or Mr. Lowe did ought to be sent for. I wanted to start off Tom on horseback as early as five o’clock, but she would not hear of such a thing: says she, ‘No, indeed! it’s a bad bilious attack, I suppose; as soon as my inside is quieted, I’ll take a *James’s Powder*.’ But it struck me, Miss



Armstrong, it might be a bilious *fever*, and that's serious, you know, and should be properly attended to without delay."

"Certainly. I will go to Mrs. Jeliffe at once, and I think I will get Lucy to take Miss Seaton to Priests' Croft, lest there should be anything infectious."

After sending away the little girl on her own responsibility, for the General's bell had not yet rung, Edith proceeded to the housekeeper's chamber. She was shocked and startled at the sudden change in the familiar rosy, cheerful-looking face. Mrs. Jeliffe lay motionless, with her eyes closed; her features were drawn, and there was no particle of colour even in her lips. Edith watched her for several minutes, and then determined to despatch one of the servants for medical assistance. This was clearly no case of common sickness, no mere bilious attack; it might be the commencement of gastric fever! The remains of the cough-mixture stood on the mantelpiece—Mrs. Jeliffe had taken a large dose. Edith almost unconsciously took up the bottle and examined it. Yes; it was the same, to all outward appearances, as the medicine she had herself taken with so much benefit. It was brown; but was it not rather clearer than the previous mixture? The next thing was to smell it. As she did so, she started, for it certainly had a very strange and unpleasant smell—a rank sort of odour, which she was certain she had never perceived before. She made haste to taste it, and she poured out about half a tea-spoonful, and drank it slowly; the flavour was *abominable*; and she wondered how Mrs. Jeliffe could have swallowed so much of so nauseous a preparation.

She was naturally seriously alarmed, for by her advice the housekeeper had taken she knew not what, except that it was *not* the soothing, well-proved cough-mixture, nor anything that could by any possibility be mistaken for it. Again Edith smelled and tasted, and was increasingly dismayed; and all this time—it was only several moments, but it seemed a long while only—Mrs. Jeliffe lay apparently unconscious, and looking so deathlike that Nancy at the foot of the bed telegraphed her apprehensions with a most woful countenance.

"I will see Mr. Viner," said Edith in a whisper, "and

get him to send off a messenger on a fleet horse, or perhaps he will go himself. This is dreadful! Do not touch that bottle; it is no cough-mixture."

Nancy was horrified. No cough-mixture! What, then, was it? Poison, no doubt! and she remembered how her mother used to tell a tale about a lady of quality, who took a bottle full of *embrocation* in mistake for a sleeping draught, and died an hour afterwards in strong convulsions.

"Mr. Viner," said Edith, when she found the butler in his pantry, "I am in great trouble. Mrs. Jeliffe is, I fear, dangerously ill."

"You don't say so, ma'am? Nancy did tell us she had been ill all night, seized with sudden sickness, I think she said. She was not to call well yesterday; she had such a bad cold on her chest, and her cough tried her so that she got no rest; and Mrs. Jeliffe's come to that time of life that she can't stand what she did use to in former years. We're pretty much alike—we are not as young as we used to be."

"All the more reason why we should lose no time; doctor ought to be fetched at express speed."

"You don't say so, ma'am? I'll go myself. No; I'll send the head groom; he'll get over the ground more quickly than I shall. I'll call Robert and have Thunderbolt saddled this moment."

"Thank you, Mr. Viner; I will write a line or two, I think. The doctor will then perceive the urgency of the case, and bring with him what he deems expedient."

"All right, ma'am. Here's paper and pencil; I will give my orders this moment." And in five minutes Thunderbolt was saddled, and Robert was on his back with Edith's hastily scribbled note to Dr. Wilson in his pocket.

Meanwhile Edith returned to the sick room, and tried to administer spoonfuls of brandy, for the vomiting and retching had ceased at last, but only, as it appeared, to give place to collapse. "It's all over with her," sobbed Nancy; "she'll never speak again. She's *poisoned*, that's what she is!"

Edith shuddered, for Nancy's words only echoed her own thoughts. She could do nothing; she could only pray

silently, and watch the grey rigid features of the unfortunate patient. Then she thought of a hot bottle for the feet, and she recollected how an aunt of hers had been relieved by gin-and-water lotion applied to the head. But when that was done she could only wait and long inexpressibly for the coming of Dr. Wilson. She was alone with the invalid, when suddenly, after a deep sigh, she opened her eyes, and fixed them on her nurse. "What is it?" she inquired, feebly. "I feel too weak to stir."

"Thank God!" said Edith, at hearing the voice she had scarcely dared hope to hear again. And she thought at the same time the features were less drawn, and the lips not quite so colourless.

"What's the matter?" persisted Mrs. Jelfie, gasping out her words.

"Hush! do not talk," replied Edith. "You have been very ill, but you are better now, and we have sent for Dr. Wilson."

Then again there was silence, but Nancy returning to her post nodded her head approvingly. She evidently thought the patient was looking a little better. "Could you not take a cup of tea?" asked Edith, presently, anxious to administer some kind of food. But Mrs. Jelfie seemed to sicken again at the thought, and presently, Mr. Viner appeared with a small cup of strong beef-extract, which, since the General's illness, had been always on hand, for the days of *Liebig* were not yet. Into it he dropped a little brandy, and requested Edith to administer it. "That will rouse her up a bit, if anything will, ma'am!" he said, under his breath. "The General would have died but for it—that's my opinion. Keep on with it till the doctor comes—half a tea-spoonful at a time, every five minutes."

Edith obeyed, only too thankful to have something to do. And in less than half-an-hour the good effects of Mr. Viner's prescription were apparent; the invalid moved and coughed a little, and though still white and weak, began to look, as Nancy said, "quite natural-like."

"I shan't want the doctor after all," she said, feebly, as she swallowed a spoonful of the nourishment. "Oh, dear! oh, dear! how dreadfully ill I was!"

"Indeed, you want the doctor very much," answered

Edith. "You must be well nursed now, even though the worst is over. Are your feet warm?"

"Oh, yes! I have a hot-water bottle, I do believe—a thing I hate. What's it all about, Miss Armstrong?"

"Don't trouble yourself now; just take a little more beef-tea, and then try to go to sleep till the doctor comes."

She seemed inclined to obey, but Nancy had not long left the room, when the patient opened her eyes, and in her own natural voice, though still weak of utterance, said, "It's no use, I can't sleep yet; I am better, though—I shall get over it, please the Lord."

"Indeed, I hope you will. I feel sure you will. I wish you could sleep."

"But I can't. I feel as if I were coming back to my senses. Miss Armstrong, do you know what it was that upset me?"

"I am afraid that I do, Mrs. Jeliffe; it was the cough-medicine you thought you took."

"*Thought* I took! I did take it, worse luck. Thinks I, I'll give it a good trial. I'll have a handsome dose. And I drank, I should say, pretty near a wine-glass full. Oh, why did you let me take such a powerful thing? A thimbleful of it must be more than enough. It is a very dangerous medicine, Miss Armstrong; I am thankful you never gave dear little missy any of it."

And so was Edith. She might have done so had it seemed at all expedient, for the original mixture was admirably suited to children. It was not too disagreeable, and could no more harm a child than a cup of bread and milk. And now, relieved from anxiety, she began to puzzle over the mystery of the metamorphosed draught. Once more she examined the bottle, and read the label, and looked at the seal upon the cork. There were the directions, in the Lunechester druggist's own handwriting, and there was the cipher which he always impressed on the seal of his medicines.

"You didn't make a mistake?" said Mrs. Jeliffe, watching the examination.

"There is a mistake. But, dear Mrs. Jeliffe, I did not make it. This is the bottle I brought with me from

Luncheon. I could swear to it if required. But the mixture is not the same; it has been tampered with."

"Then the Lord help me, for I am a dead woman! It's poison, depend upon it! How you do look, Miss Armstrong!"

The fact was, Edith was beginning to feel very unwell herself; a sudden nausea seized her; her head seemed to swim, and there was a curious burning sensation in her throat. She drank some water, and the speedy result was a fit of real sickness.

"That's how I was taken," said the housekeeper, in alarm. "Have you had any of the stuff?"

"Yes; I drank about half a tea-spoonful," Edith replied, as soon as she could speak. "That, and the smell, told me that the medicine had been changed. As I took so little, I hope the effects will soon pass away."

They did not, however, for while Mrs. Jeliffe rallied, Edith became worse and worse, being violently sick and almost convulsed every few minutes; and Chalfonts being, as we know, at a considerable distance, and the doctor having set out on one of his country rounds, it appeared as if no one was coming to the rescue. In the meantime, Mrs. Clifford came to the Hall, to satisfy herself, for the servants had carried strange reports between the two houses, and it was known that a swift messenger had been despatched in quest of Dr. Wilson. She at once perceived that Mrs. Jeliffe had passed the crisis of her attack, but Edith was still suffering all the agonies of the horrible malady when her friend arrived. She could only learn from the servants what had happened, for Edith lay almost lifeless between the seizures, and Mrs. Jeliffe was still too exhausted to carry on any regular conversation. Everybody looked anxiously for Dr. Wilson. Of course, it had become necessary to tell the master of the house what had occurred. He sent for Mrs. Clifford as soon as he heard of her being within call, for he did not quite believe the strange statement of Mr. Viner, and of his valet, Mr. Antony, who both declared that the two ladies were *poisoned*.

"Poisoned!" cried the General, in great wrath. "I'll have nobody poisoned in my house; nobody ever was

poisoned before. Have you sent for stomach-pumps and antidotes?"

Mrs. Clifford explained that stomach-pumps were the last thing needed, and that Dr. Wilson had been sent for soon after breakfast, and it was now past noon.

"Tell me all about it," said the General, still savagely. "I can't believe Antony's cock-and-bull tale. He says Miss Armstrong brought the stuff into the house, that she first administered it to Jeliffe, and then took it herself. It sounds very much like wilful murder, and attempted suicide, and that sort of thing, you know!"

Then Mrs. Clifford told her story, as she had received it from Nancy, who had been for some hours in attendance on the first patient, and had been present when Edith tasted the poison, and when her illness commenced. In conclusion, she said, "The real medicine is most excellent, for I used it in my own family all last winter, with the happiest results. And when my husband had that terrible cough, in April, after getting wet through coming over Craddle Pass, he took the cough-mixture regularly for several days, and was cured. I have a bottle in my house now; I am never without it."

"Will you send for it? I should like to compare the two physicks."

"I have already sent for it, wishing Dr. Wilson to pronounce an opinion on both the true and the false medicine."

"But how came the medicine to be false? Heaven preserve us, if the druggists are to make up hellish brews like this, instead of healing draughts! It must be Postlethwaite who is to blame, of course. I'll prosecute him! I owe it to the public to prosecute him; people's lives are not to be trifled with in this way."

"But Postlethwaite is such a respectable man, and understands his business more thoroughly than most country druggists. He is a regular apothecary, and so careful and particular—an elderly man, too!"

"I suppose he keeps assistants? He has a wonderful business."

"Of course he has several, and very steady, well educated young men they are."

"And apprentices, no doubt ! Raw lads, who perhaps know a little dog-Latin, and amuse themselves with playing pranks on their master's customers ?"

"But I was going to tell you, General, I was with Miss Armstrong when she bought this very bottle of mixture, and I bought another at the same time—the identical bottle I have sent for, and which is, I believe, as yet uncorked, because no one has needed it since I brought it home. Well, Mr. Postlethwaite himself from first to last made up the prescription, which he keeps for those who require the medicine. A good many people use it, for it has been recommended from friend to friend ; and Postlethwaite makes up for the whole country, for the Duke when he is at Aldinghame, to the cobbler and the herdsman. Whatever went into Miss Armstrong's bottle went into mine, as she must very well know, for we were talking to Mr. Postlethwaite, while he filled both bottles from the same sources."

"Talking ! Ah, you women must talk ! The man did not know what he was about with your chitter-chatter in his ears. If I had been bothered with women's chatter when I was in the Peninsula, I should have lost my senses, and have suffered defeat."

"Perhaps ! If the contents of my bottle are as poisonous as Miss Armstrong's I will consent at least to share the blame with Mr. Postlethwaite. And here he comes—no ! not Mr. Postlethwaite, but the messenger I sent to Priests' Croft—one of your own garden boys."

"He might have smashed it on the road ; boys are no more to be trusted than unbroken colts," growled the General, who could not yet get over "a case of poisoning" at Seaton Hall. He wanted to bring some one to book there and then. The bottle, however, was not "smashed," and it was, as Mrs. Clifford expected, safely corked. The mixture—whatever it might be—was still in all its virgin integrity, precisely as it left the counter of the respectable and trustworthy Mr. Postlethwaite. The General became interested ; it was quite a little *cause célèbre* of his very own. He rang the bell and desired that Miss Armstrong's bottle, which had caused so much mischief, should be brought to him.

"Now, then," he said, "we two cannot analyse, but we have our senses, Mrs. Clifford, and we might as well compare these mixtures ourselves. Will you uncork your own specimen? I will stick to the one which has, in a measure, become my property, though I did not purchase it; I am a magistrate, and should have to inquire into this matter if I were not personally interested in it."

"But, I pray you, do not *taste* your mixture, General. Half a tea-spoonful, three-quarters at the utmost, has been sufficient to cause intense suffering and prostration to Miss Armstrong."

"Taste it! Not I. I would as soon taste ratsbane! It's *poison*, of course! The question at present is, whether your potion is of the same nature? In Mr. Clifford's interests I must forbid you to taste it."

By this time Mrs. Clifford had uncorked her sealed bottle and smelt at it.

"This is all right," she said immediately; "but it is not at all like the other; the odour of that is horrible."

"Horrible, indeed!" cried the General, as he sniffed and grimaced. "If I might venture to use plain English, I should say it *stinks*!"

As it really did. Mademoiselle Annette had presented her rival with a potent drug, pure and simple, which, to become at all medicinal, requires copious dilution. In the state in which the two women had taken it it was in fact an irritant poison, though not necessarily fatal. The General took the second and undiminished bottle, and sniffed at that, and then again at the first, and shook his head appallingly. "Yours is all right, I fancy," he said, turning to Mrs. Clifford; "there's aniseed and elecampane, and perhaps *squills* in it, I should say. There's deadly nightshade, and monkshood of hemlock, 'eye of newt, and toe of frog,' and all the rest of it, that goes to make 'hell broth,' when the witches brew, in this abominable 'mixture,' which is to be taken a dessert-spoonful at a time, 'when the cough is troublesome.' Why does not Wilson come?"

He came at last, post-haste, and quickly relieved the General's worst fears; Mrs. Jeliffe was recovering fast,



and Edith was much better, but both had taken that which might have been deadly.

"What is it, doctor?" asked the General, putting the half-empty bottle before him. The doctor smelled, and just touched a drop with the tip of his tongue.

"I really don't know what it is till I analyse it," he said; "but of course it's no '*cough-mixture*,' it is no *medicine* of any kind. Neither Postlethwaite nor his people could possibly have made such a mistake. Its properties are violently and *dangerously* emetic."

"Is it poison?"

"It is poisonous—I cannot say more. It would prove fatal or otherwise, according to the dose and the constitution. The dose that Mrs. Jeliffe took might have killed her had she been ten years older. It seems to me this stuff is of the nature of a certain virulent American poison, made from the root of a rare Brazilian plant, the juice of which raises very painful blisters."

"Now, what do you say to the other, purchased at the same time and place, and compounded from the same sources?"

Then the doctor took stock of Mrs. Clifford's mixture, and he not only smelt, but tasted unhesitatingly. "This is all right," he said, "and a very good medicine it is. There is nothing in this to hurt a baby, though I should give it to a young child in dilution, because it contains a mild anodyne that might not suit every child. But a grown person! Bless me! if I emptied this bottle which is now full, it would not serve me as half a dozen drops of the other vile stuff would do! *This* is a healing medicine, of more or less efficacy, according to the complaint, &c., &c. *That* is a witch's brew! Macbeth's three friends might have concocted it. No English chemist ever furnished that dose, most certainly not poor Postlethwaite, who, I'll engage to say, has not even got the drug which is the essence of it."

"Where did it come from, then?"

"That must at present remain a mystery. Miss Armstrong is so exhausted, I could not venture to question her."

"She could tell you nothing about it, I am convinced,"

said Mrs. Clifford. "The mixture sold to her was precisely the same as my own. I watched Mr. Postlethwaite while he made up the prescription. He filled both bottles from the one vessel in which he mixed the medicine. When that bottle left his shop, and when it entered this house, it contained, I am positive, nothing but the usual innocent cough-mixture."

"Would the real cough-mixture cause sickness under any circumstances?" asked the General.

"It might if taken to excess. I should not like to take at one dose a whole bottleful of the stuff, I own; it would spoil my dinner. But I should simply be *qualmish*; there would be no spasmodic vomiting. Half a pint of treacle and aniseed-water might act as an emetic; but the action would soon be over. It would be a natural sort of sickness, a mere effort of nature; and that is how the cough-mixture, if taken in large quantities, might act. But this is quite another thing. In this case of my two patients, especially in that of Mrs. Jelffe, some kind of poisonous irritant has caused the malady. If Mrs. Jelffe had taken twice the quantity she did, it must have ended in a coroner's inquest. If Miss Armstrong had taken as much as Mrs. Jelffe did, I am afraid I could not have saved her; she is naturally very susceptible of poisons, I should say. Some people can eat stale fish with impunity, while others are, as it were, poisoned by it, and suffer all the effects of poison till it is expelled from the system. The contents of this bottle shall be carefully analysed. Was the medicine tampered with before or after Miss Armstrong left Lunechester?"

"It must have been done here, for Miss Armstrong, in my company, came to Seatondale only a few hours after the purchase of the cough-mixture. It has been standing on the mantelpiece of her bedroom ever since her arrival, Nancy tells me," said Mrs. Clifford.

"Do you suspect any of your household?" asked the doctor, turning to the General.

"No," he answered, slowly; "there is no one in the house at this moment whom I could possibly suspect. I was not sure as to Mademoiselle Annette, and therefore I dismissed her."

"Did she leave before or after Miss Armstrong's entering upon her charge?"

"Immediately afterwards. Miss Armstrong arrived in the evening, and Mademoiselle left on the following afternoon."

"Had she, during that interval, any opportunity of doing such a piece of mischief?"

"I do not know; I must question the servants. I will have the matter thoroughly sifted; and if Mademoiselle is guilty, she shall not escape."

"Where is she now?"

"I do not know; no one here knows, I believe. Fabian could tell us, I suppose; but I particularly desired my people not to ask any questions."

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## CHAPTER XXX.

### TAKEN CAPTIVE.

"Love at first sight, first-born, and heir to all,  
Made this night thus."

AND thoroughly sifted the matter was, so far, at least, as all sorts of inquiries went; but when all was said and done no one was much the wiser. It was easy to *suppose* who was the miscreant; but it was impossible absolutely to fix the guilt upon any particular person, nor, when the contents of the bottle came to be analysed, could it be determined that the draught itself was downright poison, although it was undoubtedly of a virulent nature, and pretty certain to be dangerous in its effects. It was a subtly compounded draught, and the principal ingredient was the potent drug named by Dr. Wilson—a drug used by South American Indians to produce spasmodic sickness in cases of imaginary bewitchment! and sometimes, when taken too freely, or in certain states of the body, causing speedy

death. It was a medicine certainly, but one of those remedies which are far worse than the diseases they are intended to counteract. No English doctor would ever have administered such a dose ; "in fact," said Dr. Wilson, "the drug itself, so far as I know, has never been included in any civilised pharmacopœia. The question now is, who worked this diabolical piece of mischief and malice, and are you safe from further recurrence of semi-poisoning ? By the way, it might be whole poisoning next time."

"We may guess the criminal's name," replied the General, gruffly ; "but as for hunting down our game, that, I am afraid, is impossible. I think we are tolerably safe now ; there is no one in the house whom we can reasonably suspect. However, in future we will keep our medicines under lock and key, and, what is more, I will have no one under my roof with whose antecedents I am not fully acquainted."

News of "the poisoning case at Seaton Hall," as the affair was called in the neighbourhood, could not fail to reach Malham Tower. And in a day or two Mr. Fabian walked over. On the way he met Mrs. Clifford, to whom he only bowed ; there always had been an unacknowledged antagonism between those two, which of late had grown into positive unfriendliness. The curate's wife was largely endowed with that curious "sixth sense," which only its possessors can at all understand, and she read the priest but too plainly, of which fact he, being also gifted with the intuitive faculty, was as well aware as if she had been in the habit of openly denouncing him. And yet, in spite of the outward—ay, and of the inward—antagonism between this man and woman, the man rather admired the woman for her farseeingness and thoroughness of character, and liked her for her deep attachment to her husband, who, to use a vulgar expression, could not see an inch beyond his nose, and who was painfully lacking in those mental qualities which constitute "thoroughness."

When Mr. Fabian reached the Hall, he found the General asleep ; he slept continually now, and it was judged inexpedient to awake him. Antony, who kept watch and ward, came out to meet Mr. Fabian, and politely intimated that his master could not be intruded on just

then ; but there was no one in the library, would not Mr. Fabian like to rest there after his long walk ?—the General might rouse up in half an hour or so. It was seldom that Mr. Fabian hesitated, but he did so now, and, strange to say, he did not himself know wherefore. It was the most natural thing in the world that he should wait awhile to see his friend : he had done so frequently ; in truth, he had not always stayed to be invited—he was so much at home in that house that he went whither he would, and remained as long as he pleased, no one dreaming of interference. Sometimes he wrote letters in the library ; sometimes he took down a volume, and became absorbed in its contents ; sometimes, if the weather were fine, he sauntered along the garden walks, or loitered in the comfortable summer-house, or still oftener sought the apartments of Mademoiselle, where he conversed with her, and with the little heiress, who was always delighted to receive his visits. But he had an instinctive feeling now that he must not presume too much : how far he was suspected he could not guess, but that the General's confidence in him was shaken he knew too well. Moreover, he did not wish to encounter the new governess ; yet by a curious contrariety of feeling, he wished to converse with her, and determine for himself whether she was to be regarded as an uncompromising foe, or a possible friend and ally. The one glance he had of her told him that at least she would not be *neutral* ! There was not an atom of passivity in her nature ; she would either help forward or mar the undertaking to which he was committed. And it behoved him, as speedily as possible, to take her measure—and yet !

And yet something said to him—"Leave this girl alone ! With her strong sense, and her splendid beauty, she will be too much for you. You stand upon the brink of a precipice ; be warned !" But the man was really weary ; he was not nearly as strong as he used to be ; anxiety, disappointment, and chagrin had worn him body and spirit ; the burden he had to bear seemed at times too much for his strength ; he had even begun at intervals to long for the rest of the grave, where no enemy could slander him or misconstrue his motives, where no false

friend could stealthily undermine his labours and counteract his influence, where there were no spies nor subtle inquisitors, no baffling mysteries, no feverish pursuit of the unattainable.

So he yielded to his bodily weakness, and asking Antony to send him a glass of wine, retreated to the library, where now the General never entered. The wine only made him feverish and drowsy, and he did not wish to fall asleep. He opened one of the windows and looked out into the pleasant garden, still radiant with many bright autumnal flowers. The dew yet sparkled on the velvet greensward, which was, in spite of the gardener's care, thickly strewn with the sere rustling leaves that fluttered down in showers from the now sparsely foliated trees. There were crimson haws on the thorn, and glossy coral hips on the briar-roses; the mountain-ash glowed again in the mellow October sunlight; the horse-chestnut's few last palms were of all rich dyes and hues, and right in front of the window where he stood was a lovely weeping birch, its slender, willowy stem gleaming like polished silver, and its tresses of gold waving gently in the light, fresh morning breeze.

"How that silver birch has shot up since first I knew it!" he said to himself. "It was but a young sapling when I came into the North; and this Virginian creeper, that now covers all the southern gable, was newly planted; and the ivy, too has crept and crept many a foot, while we have slept and waked. How quietly, how imperceptibly, yet how surely, Nature progresses. Why cannot we work as she works, without seeming effort, and yet with such sure aim, such unfailing success?"

And the silent voice that ever and anon would speak to his soul, replied, "Nature's work is holy—God's work, not man's; therefore she cannot fail!"

And again he looked out upon the flowers—the late roses, the overgrown dahlias, the bushes of mignonette, and fragrant stock—for it was an old-fashioned garden, though it was not wanting in scarlet geraniums, grey heliotrope, calceolarias, and other modern favourites. Above all, the fuchsias were magnificent, showering their purple and ruby coloured bells on all around, while near at hand was the curious, rosy, wax-like fruit of a nearly leafless spindle-

tree. Then a robin tamely perched upon a spray of jasmine, so close that he could have touched it, and poured out its sweet low song almost in his ear. He could not but think of

" Sweet messenger of ' calm decay,'  
Saluting sorrow as you may,  
As one still bent to find or make the best,  
In thee, and in this quiet mead,  
The lesson of sweet peace I read,  
Rather in all to be resigned than blest.

" O cheerful, tender strain ! the heart  
That duly bears with you its part,  
Singing so thankful to the dreary blast,  
Though gone and spent its joyous prime,  
And on the world's autumnal time,  
'Mid withered hues and sere its lot be cast."

The " cheerful, tender strain " warbled on and on, and ceased, and the bird flew away to other bowers ; and still John Fabian stood in the quiet autumn sunshine, musing on what that " sweet messenger of calm decay " had said to him. He could read the lesson it taught, he could even learn it by rote, as children and parrots learn what they do not in the least comprehend ; but it was in vain that he tried to lay it to heart, it was in vain even that he tried to apply it to himself and to his mission. It was in vain that he went on—

" That is the heart for watchman true,  
Waiting to see what God will do,  
As o'er the Church the gathering twilight falls ;  
No more he strains his wistful eye,  
If chance the golden hours be nigh,  
By youthful hope seen beaming round her walls.

" Forced from his shadowy paradise,  
His thoughts to heaven the steadier rise ;  
There seek his answer when the world reproves ;  
Contented in his darkling round,  
If only he be faithful found,  
When from the east th' eternal morning moves."

Yes ! it was all very deep and beautiful ; but like a resistless tide the waves of thought rolled over him. " Was he really, veritably, waiting to see what God would do ? Did he feel the rock beneath his feet as he traced through the cloud the eternal cause ? *Did* his thoughts rise to heaven the more steadily as his shadowy paradise

of conquest and ambition melted away? Would he be 'faithful found' when the eternal morning should dawn upon the earth? Faithful to what? To his Church or to his God?"

Then, horrified at the blasphemy which separated God and the Catholic Church, he muttered a prayer for forgiveness. Of course, as faithful to God's Vicegerent, he was faithful to the Lord Himself. And yet he could not but ask himself, "Is it indeed God's will that His sworn servants should work so much sorrow and so much bitter pain?" Then, to his heart he answered, "Even so, if the sorrow be cleansing, if the bitterness be wholesome. Men *must* suffer till they come to the One True Communion. *God wills it.*"

But there was no response in Fabian's own soul. That voice which had spoken before—a voice unheard till lately—whispered, "Must you indeed darken this fair scene? Must you come like the spoiler to deface its calm, sweet beauty? Why should this happy English home, this 'haunt of ancient peace,' be laid desolate? Why should that innocent child be the victim of men who need not her, but her rich store of wealth? Why should Rome put her foot upon this land, which is glad and prosperous without her? Can it be well to plot and to deceive? Can it be for God's glory to lie—to live a lie, to swear, if needs be, a lie?"

In that moment the strong man was so weak he could have wept. He was tired, so tired of his weary, shameful task, so oppressed with a sense of failure and defeat, so overpowered with the fear that of late had grown almost to certainty, that when he had toiled in vain, and lowered himself to every kind of miserable cheat and falsehood, others—those who hated him—would enter in and reap the fruits of his endeavours. He it was who had sown the seed in the fallow ground which he had first broken up; he it was who had planted and tilled with watchful care. He had been the faithful, patient husbandman, willing to bear the heat and burden of the day, if only he might at last reap the rich, ripe, golden sheaves. But not for him were the joys of harvest, not for him were the purple clusters of the vintage. And so he stood—



"Like some bold seer in a trance,  
Seeing all his own mischance  
With a glassy countenance."

Rome is not particularly merciful to her own children, and that John Fabian knew! She can be cruel to her own nursling as to the alien; she can wound the hand that cherished her, and march to victory over the bleeding hearts of those who have erst given her of their best and dearest. He had been too long and too deeply in the councils of his Church not to be fully aware of this. Was he prepared for the entire self-abnegation, the willing self-immolation which that Church demanded? His *Mother-Church*! Did she not sometimes comport herself too much like a cruel step-dame?

He might have gone on thus meditating all the morning, but suddenly there was a merry shout and a leap across the room, and two fat little hands were placed across his eyes, demanding who it was that held him fast.

"Where have you been, Uncle Fabian?" cried the child, for so she had learned to call him. "You have not been here this long, long time, scarcely since Mademoiselle went away! Are you going to stay?"

"Only for a little while," he answered.

"Oh, but you must stop all day; mustn't he, Miss Armstrong?" And then Fabian turned and saw that Edith had entered with her pupil. What possessed him, he could not tell; he put out his hand and gave her a cordial greeting. And, in spite of himself, he could not feel any unkindness towards this beautiful, stately woman, whom he and his confederates had designed at all risks to crush and ruin. It was by no means the first time he had found himself face to face with perfect feminine loveliness, but never had he bowed to womanhood's sweet charms, never had he cared for perfect lineaments and faultless outline of living form and feature, any more than if he saw them on mere canvas; never had lustrous eyes haunted him, never had rose lips touched one instinct of his nature. In spite of all that is urged, and, as we believe, most justly urged, against the priesthood of Rome, there are some, we are sure, who are pure in heart and life as in outward seeming. And Fabian was one of these. He was a celibate in spirit,

as well as in profession; he had been utterly true to his early vows, and he knew no more of "*Love*," as we understand the expression, than the child who is naturally ignorant of the existence of such a passion in the world around him.

He simply knew that men and women loved; that they married and were given in marriage, according to God's holy ordinance. He believed, too, in the utter sacredness of wedded bonds, but not for him were such ties possible or even expedient. Cold and passionless he had been all his life, as regarded the other sex, but that was over now; a new life was quickened in him; whence it came he could not tell, but there it was—his whole being thrilled at Edith's voice, and he all but trembled as he touched her hand.

I think, generally speaking, in youth we drift from force of circumstances into attachments, which pass away or deepen into real, true love, as the case may be; but the love that comes in middle life—and some plants do blossom out of season, and some, aloe-like, bloom late—nearly always comes suddenly and irresistibly, and is strong, nay, stronger than death itself. There are not many such cases, perhaps, and it is well there are not, for out of this intense and perfect love, which is as tender as it is passionate, as unselfish as it is ardent, and as lasting as it is sudden, springs too often more pain and suffering than joy and gladness, nor does it always find here the resting-place for which it yearns. And yet it is precisely such love as this that lifts a man above himself, that makes a woman stronger, better, holier than she ever would have been without it. It gives a new life to the spirit; it opens the eyes which have been shut down on much that is best and grandest; it fills the soul with a strange and undefinable sense of hitherto undreamed-of power and happiness; and all this, though it find never its earthly sequences, though it end, according to outward seeming, *in nothing!*

All this, however, is parenthetical, and it is not meant to excuse John Fabian, because in this instance there was nothing to excuse. His falling in love with Edith Armstrong was a curious physiological fact, no doubt; but it

was his misfortune, not his fault, that this new, strange life sprang up almost to full stature within him with scarce a moment's warning. He was a man endowed, like his fellows, with natural affections, such as are common alike to prince and peasant, but which had, till now, lain dormant—partly, perhaps, owing to temperament, and partly to the knowledge of his position; and he had as much right to love and win a woman as any other man of his years who is still unwedded. Man, not God, had imposed upon him the vows under which he stood; an apostate Church, not Almighty law, had forged those strong chains which now, for the first time, he felt to be iron manacles and fetters.

It was not so much Edith's wondrous beauty that subdued him as Edith's self. I told you that Fabian was endowed with that rare sixth sense which gives men and women a strange insight into other people's hearts and minds; and so it came to pass that he comprehended the beauty of the inner woman—her loveliness of soul, her strength of purpose, her purity of mind, her crystal truth, her richness of intellect, as by a sudden revelation. And yet though, as far as he knew, there were no barriers, save the one, between them—though the electric spark had been kindled in her heart as in his—though she had rendered him love for love, and given herself there and then, in all her glorious womanhood, to him alone—though all this, which was not, had been, [she was still as much out of his reach as any "bright particular star" of evening. As another man's wife she could not be more completely sundered from him; for he could never ask her to come to him and share his home, and be the light of his life. He knew it was folly, madness; but he could not resist the charm of Edith's presence; the spell was upon him, and he did not even try to shake it off. For one little hour he would revel in the sweetness of her companionship. Little guessed she, as she talked on various themes, that the proud man before her—the man she had been taught to dread—had become her slave; but she was surprised to find how agreeable he was, how frank was his manner, how courteous his speech, how interesting his conversation. Surely, *surely* he could not be the black

traitor, the ruthless conspirator, the wolf in sheep's clothing, of whose cunning and falsehood she had been warned! And while he talked with her, and surrendered himself to her influence, he was, indeed, another man. It was a relief to him that he had at last to go away without seeing General Seaton, for he felt as if any sort of rational discourse with him would, just at present, be an impossibility.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

### THE SLOWLY ASCENDING SCALE.

"This is a giant land, our England—hers a race of giant will,  
 Giant strength of good at warfare, with a giant strength for ill;  
 And I hear the battle roaring, I, a sluggard in the fight,  
 Set among the ranks of darkness, and a cloud is on my sight,  
 For I cannot see before me, charging on, the sons of light.  
 Though the shadows ever thicken, though the plague is all abroad,  
 Though the church a vine that withers, and the mart a mine of  
     fraud,  
 Though the leaders to destruction, swarming more and more in-  
     crease,  
 Yet the righteous have their captains in the war God crowns with  
     peace."

AND where was Mademoiselle Annette? you will ask. Was she never accused of the crime which she had wilfully and maliciously committed? Did she escape with impunity? For awhile she did, as far as that special malpractice was concerned; she did not even know how thoroughly she had succeeded in tormenting not only her hated rival, but also the housekeeper, against whom she had long entertained a bitter grudge; she did not hear of her victims' agonies till long afterwards, when the news had lost its zest, for she did not remain at Malham Tower for any length of time. Mrs. Darcy, *alias* Mother Bridget, *alias* Athanasia, would not have her there, and Athanasia was mistress of the Tower household, and never failed to hold her own, whatever might be the subject in dispute.

What were her relations to Father Fabian? you may perhaps inquire. She was certainly something more than his hired servant! She certainly was, for she was her master's first cousin, many years older than he; the daughter of an early and unacknowledged marriage—if marriage it were—of an elder sister of Fabian's Venetian mother. She had been brought up in several convents, and she was a bigoted champion of the Church to which she belonged. She professed eventually in an obscure Irish convent of the Ursuline order, and would doubtless have become Lady Abbess of the little community, only that her restless, ambitious nature and her imperious temper alike stood in the way of such advancement. To reign arbitrarily over a few silly, superstitious, ignorant women was not at all what she wanted; she longed for a position in the world, where as diplomat, *intriguante*, and conspirator, she could advance the interests of the Papacy; her most ardent desire was to have a hand in the *conversion of England*, to join the great secret crusade, which was already organised with that laudable intent. The nuns did not like her, and were glad to be rid of her on any terms; her confessor, a crafty Jesuit, and her superiors generally, recognised her talents, but were by no means sorry to part with her. She was "too clever by half" for the people with whom she was associated; she needed a wider scope, a grander field of action, wherein to exercise her undoubted genius, and she could do no good, and might do a great deal of harm, if she remained shut up within the narrow limits of an obscure nunnery.

"In fact, your Eminence," wrote the Bishop to a certain Cardinal, celebrated for putting the right men and women in the right places, and for pulling square people out of round holes and fitting them into new holes that suited them to a nicety,—“if Sister Bridget has not her head and her hands full she will do no end of mischief! She wants a post in which her wonderful energies may find an outlet. Dissimulation is her *forte*, and, except as regards the Church, she has not a particle of conscience. For the Church she will work till she drops, and she will work fairly or unfairly, but she would prefer the latter mode. She may be trusted with important issues, and her discre-

tion and secrecy are truly wonderful in a woman. She will also be ready for any emergency."

It happened that when this letter reached the Cardinal, Fabian was closeted with him. "Let me see!" said his Eminence, who knew all about everybody; "is not this Sister Bridget a connection of your own? And would she not serve our turn at the present juncture? You cannot work single-handed at Seatondale; let her be nominally your housekeeper. She is old enough to give no occasion for scandal; besides, as an Anglican, that sort of thing would not be of such paramount importance. It strikes me this lady would prove an able coadjutor; what say you, Father Fabian?"

"It may be," he replied, "but I can say nothing till I have seen her. I saw her once, when she was quite a girl and I a child, but I have only the slightest recollection of a tall, dark-complexioned young woman, with flashing, black eyes, and a singularly melodious voice. Her mother was my mother's half-sister—under the bar-sinister though—but there were peculiar circumstances, and the relationship was always acknowledged. She, too—my half-aunt—involved herself in some kind of unhappy mystery, and in her case also, I am afraid, the Sacrament of Matrimony was never duly administered."

"That is of no consequence! So much the better, indeed! Those who have this blot on their escutcheon are, as a rule, the best tools we can employ. They have little if anything to lose, and they have everything to gain. By fidelity, tact, and ability they may gain much; a woman at once ambitious, unscrupulous, and discreet is a *rara avis*. I thank Father Dermott for his communication."

And so it was presently arranged that Athanasia Caselli, called in religion Sister, and finally "Mother Bridget," should begin her new career as her cousin's hired housekeeper at Malham Tower. "But it is burying her alive!" urged Fabian, who feared she might turn restive on his hands, and prove troublesome, if not dangerous.

"Not at all," replied the more sagacious Cardinal; "if you make of this Malham mission what is intended, she will find abundance of occupation suited to her capacity."

There will be much that you will be glad to resign to her, I fancy. You will have to concentrate all your forces on Seatondale itself. It is in your charge to convert General Seaton to the faith of his ancestors and to educate the baby-heiress as a rigid Catholic. As a priest of Rome you would, of course, be powerless, and worse than powerless : the very name of *Rome* scares more than half the English people. It is their bugaboo ! their *wehr-wolf* ! their Blue-beard's Closet ! which is at once the dread of their existence and the *point d'appui* upon which their curiosity centres. Now, the Anglican is quite another thing. He is a clergyman of their own so-called Church ; only he shows them a more excellent way. Step by step he leads them on ; little by little he educates them in Roman, not Anglo-Catholic, dogmas. It is precept upon precept, and line upon line, you know !—here a little, oh, such a very little, and there a very little ! In the commencement, at least, we must move *cautiously* ! In a few years time, when the play begins to tell, and the game is in our hands, we shall not be so painfully restrained ; we may show a little more unreserve, and we need not stand, cap in hand, to the Evangelicals any longer. It will be pleasant when it comes to that, Father Fabian !”

“Will it ever come to that ? There are the *Dissenters* ; your Eminence forgets them.”

“Curse the Dissenters !” replied his Eminence, with unmistakable sincerity. “No, I did not forget them, for they are not to be forgotten. But for these hateful, double-dyed heretics our work would so easily be done. England would be ours after a little clever finessing, after a very transitory struggle. But for the Dissenters—again I curse them body and soul !—the day would be our own. Holy Church might write, ‘*veni, vidi, vici* !’ For what is the Episcopal Church of England as a bulwark against *our* domination ? She thinks she is something *now*, and so she is, though not a something to be in the least dismayed at. Wait awhile, wait twenty years, and then see how ‘*Our beloved Church*,’ as those stupid Evangelicals pride themselves on calling her, fights for *Protestantism* ! She Protestant, indeed ! She will indignantly disdain the imputation. Wait twenty years, I say, perhaps only twelve

or fifteen years, and Anglo-Catholicism, not Protestantism, will be dominant in the English Establishment. The Evangelicals will be nowhere, or only a weak minority, fallen from their high estate, and powerless of themselves to stem the current which sets towards the Tiber. Then might we float into harbour with the flag of the Holy See at the masthead! then might we march into the citadel with the banners of the Cross unfurled—only—only for those accursed Dissenters.” And his Eminence set his teeth as he spoke of those obnoxious heretics.

“Is nothing to be done with them? Can they neither be won over nor trampled into dust? I reserve my own opinion: I want to know what your Eminence advises.”

“As Dissenters, as Nonconformists—call them which you will—*nothing can be done!* Take that as a fact established and indisputable. But once make them Episcopalians—Evangelicals, of course—and your work is done; they will do the rest themselves. They will soon acquire a taste for the ritual; they will, out of sheer reaction, affect a little Sacramentarianism, such as even Low Churchism tolerates, or must tolerate, while the present rubric stands. They will by-and-by make much of Baptism and the Supper of the Lord—the Communion will become the Eucharist, Saints’ days will be observed, there will be a choral procession now and then—say on Easter Sunday and on other great Feasts of the Church, and so on—and so on, you comprehend? The old, and even the middle-aged, will not go so far perhaps; they will cling to their ancient Puritanic faith, and never get any farther than the Low Church, which is only useful as the first stepping-stone between the opposite and unbridgeable banks of the stream that separates the faith of Rome from that of Wesley, Watts, Robert Hall, and Co. But the young people are our true hope. They naturally love novelty and excitement, they worship the picturesque, the romantic, the æsthetic; they will soon spurn the bald, meagre services of the orthodox Evangelical party, and once having turned their faces Romewards, whether they know it or not, the victory is sure. It is only to work well and wisely the *religionistic element* which so many people mistake for religion itself.”



"Then your Eminence recommends a slowly ascending scale, beginning with the Dissenters, who are to be converted to *any sort* of Episcopalianism. Once within the pale of the Establishment, they are to be gradually taught the merits of a very moderate and modest Anglicanism; they will have learned, by that time, to be ashamed of their former Dissent, though they will not be ready, or nearly ready, for true Catholic union. Then, by imperceptible degrees, they are to be trained to a more pronounced Ritualism, to a more thorough Sacramentarianism, to a due reception of priestly powers and authority, to the practice of confession and of penance, till at last they are so bewildered as to what constitutes the exact difference between Anglicanism and Romanism, that they are easily persuaded to take the final step, and seek reconciliation with the elder Church. Is not that about the programme your Eminence would supply?"

"Precisely! My dear son, you have stated my own views more lucidly perhaps than I should have done myself. '*A slowly ascending scale*' is the very thing, and the only thing that can succeed, unless the age of miracles be revived! And you know neither you nor I believe in nineteenth century miracles; we leave them to the weak, and ignorant, and credulous, who require these adventitious aids. Miracles are excellent for weak souls, though I doubt the expediency, in the present day, of getting them up to any extent. This is not an age of credence; rather, on the contrary, it is the era of scepticism, and nine-tenths of the people, even those of our own faith, do not believe them, simply because they cannot. You might as well ask an astronomer to believe that the earth goes round the sun, or stands on the back of a huge tortoise, as seek to persuade a modern man of science of the verity of what is irreverently called '*the winking Virgin of Rimini!*' So, as miracles have ceased—if, indeed, they ever existed!—we have only our own tact and prudence to rely upon, and your '*slowly ascending scale*'—the phrase was yours, not mine—is just what is required."

"Your Eminence is pleased to be complimentary; but as the French say, '*il n'y a que le premier pas qui coute.*' And, truly, it seems to me that the *first step* in this in-

stance is the only one that need cause us any uneasiness. Converting the Dissenters is something like belling the cat."

"It may be done, I suppose! nay, it *must* be done. England will never be converted while Nonconformity prospers. Kill Dissent, or reduce it to bare existence, and you hit the nail on the head. Till Dissent is deprived of its prestige and of its rapidly increasing strength, Protestantism will flourish; till then, do what you will, you scotch, but do not kill the snake."

"You know there is a scheme for 'Comprehension'? It is mooted in two sections of the Establishment; the Broad as well as the Low Church party for once agreeing. And '*comprehension*' means widening the borders, and admitting all Dissenters to the privilege of Churchmen, without, I believe, the renunciation of their own particular form of Church government. The Methodists, I fancy, are the people of whom Mother Church has the greatest hopes; she even claims them, in virtue of the declaration of their great founder, John Wesley, as her step-children, or something of the sort."

"The Methodists would be great fools if they listened to this scheme of comprehension, which is but an old idea, clothed afresh to suit the exigencies of the hour. It will never be,—*never be!* Each year will widen the breach, and make the difficulties of union—unity of action, that is—more insuperable. While I hate and abominate Dissent, I admire it for two things—its pluck and its sincerity! Also, the sects outside the Establishment do not devour each other, while the sects inside it do—or would do so, if they could; they cannot extirpate each other, but they can fight like Kilkenny cats, till nothing is left of them worth mentioning. The Dissenters may squabble over trivialities—it's human nature to squabble; have not our own orders, Franciscans and Dominicans and the others, squabbled from time immemorial?—but they do not split and fire anathemas at each other as the Church sects do. On all vital points they manage to agree, or if they cannot agree to differ amicably; on all grand questions they hold together. Independents and Baptists work shoulder to shoulder, and the great masses of Methodism are preparing to join issues with them. I am afraid, if

Dissent and the Established Church really and truly combined in heart, in action, and not merely in profession, Rome would stand but the very poorest chance in England. If Low Church, Broad Church, and Nonconformity would actually join their forces, the Anglicans would be obliged to stand alone; but it will not be, cannot be! And *why*? Because Episcopalianism will ask too much, and concede little or nothing itself."

"Now I think I should try to further this scheme of comprehension, because, if carried out, it must greatly weaken the hands of Dissent. Dissent cannot be joined in any way with a State Church without sharing to some extent its bondage. I should like to see those turbulent, free-spoken schismatics, fettered and bound ever so little, I must confess. Then they are such champions for civil liberty, and their political power is decidedly on the increase. But 'comprehension,' as proposed, will never come to pass—the Dissenters don't want toleration, they don't ask for an amnesty, they won't be patronised, and they will have *equality*."

"It seems to me that a great work might be done, a grand point gained, if we could keep the Methodists from fraternising with the Baptists and Congregationalists. Their union is much to be deprecated; it will be bad for the Anglican Church, *ergo* bad for ourselves, since the Anglican Church is the ground on which we plant our fulcrum."

"Your Eminence is right; the Methodists must be considered; they are a numerous and powerful body. I am not certain this moment as to statistics, but I believe they equal, if they do not outnumber, all the other sects put together. I do not see how we are to set to work, but where there is a will there is a way."

"The worst of it is there are several ways, and it is so difficult to know which is actually the best. A very slight error makes a Penelope's web of our finest work."

"The simplest way is to try and draft them into the Establishment. As Methodists they are impracticable. In spite of their objection to being called Dissenters, they dissent with a vengeance if their liberties are threatened, and *they are the uncompromising enemies of Rome!*"

"Yes, Fabian, we must make them what are termed *Churchmen*—Low Churchmen, if you like, but still Churchmen! The day of small things must not be despised. There your ascending scale commences—Dissenters to be made Churchmen, Churchmen to be led on cautiously from point to point till Anglicanism triumphs, and holds its own, from John-o'-Groats, or at least from Berwick-upon-Tweed to the Land's End."

"And then Anglicanism will be absorbed in the higher and sublimer faith of the Vatican, and England will be once more won for our Holy Father the Pope."

And Fabian's face glowed as he spoke. The triumph of his Church lay very near his heart, and the distant vision of Catholic England—we should call it Papal England—fired his soul. He was ready for any enterprise, any work, any sacrifice that might be demanded of him. At this moment he would have welcomed martyrdom itself.

These were Fabian's palmy days, as you will quite understand. He was then, when this conversation took place, in high favour with the princes and dignitaries of his Church. He was well spoken off at the Papal Court, he was trusted everywhere, and his opinion was continually cited, and he had visions of splendid successes and ample rewards in the days that were to come; dreams of a cardinal's hat, perhaps even the dream of a St. Peter's chair and the triple crown!

Athanasia Caselli, as Mrs. Darcy, went to live at Malham Tower. Mr. Darcy was, of course, an invention, but it was concluded on all hands that she would fill the place with so much more dignity and effect if she were to pass as the widow of a gentleman of good family, who had left her without due provision. It was on no account to transpire that she had ever worn the religious habit; and she was to profess herself, like her master, a member of the Church of England—of the most advanced Anglican views. "For," said those who settled the whole thing, "a woman may always go farther than a man in religious profession, so much is set down to constitutional enthusiasm, and to the æsthetic tendencies of the sex."

And all went well with Mrs. Darcy ; she scarcely ever made a mistake, and the only person who actually denounced her was poor Dolly, little Beatrice's foster mother. But she had affections after all, for she grew to love her master and cousin almost passionately ; he became to her as her son ; she was to him both a devoted mother and tender elder sister ; she studied his comforts, she anticipated all his needs, she was his spy, his counsellor, the sharer of all his joys and sorrows, and his true and staunch friend always. Not to be Queen of the Jesuits would she have betrayed him, not to escape the rack would she have failed him in his hour of need.

And now dark clouds were gathering round them. Fabian's star was no longer in the ascendant ; perhaps he had been arrogant and imperious, failing to conciliate some whom he thought too humble to do him mischief ; and he made enemies, who plotted against him, while they fawned upon him and struck at him in the dark. His friend the Cardinal was still kind and cordial when they met ; but he was given to understand that he had disappointed the expectations of his superiors, that he had not redeemed his promises, that his mission promised to be an utter failure. This and much more had tortured him. When summoned to Rome he was rebuked, and warned, and questioned, and told plainly that unless something was done, in this the seventh year of his mission, he would be superseded. As it was, he must be provided with an "assistant."

And so it came to pass that the day after that memorable meeting with Edith a pale, thin, silent, middle-aged man, armed with full credentials, arrived at Malham Tower. He called himself usher or under-schoolmaster, and at once took up his residence in the Cloisters. His name, as it appeared upon his luggage, was Mr. Gerard Newcomb. And though they received him with all outward cordiality, both Fabian and Athanasia most heartily wished him in another hemisphere. By this time Made-moiselle Annette was English teacher in a French Protestant Ladies' School.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

## CROSSES AND CANDLESTICKS.

"Where the devil is resident and hath his plough going, there away with books and up with candles; away with the Bibles and up with beads; away with the Light of the Gospel, and up with the light of candles—yea, at noonday. Where the devil is resident, that he may prevail, up with all superstition and idolatry, *censing, painting, images, palms, candles, ashes, holy-water*, and new service of man's inventing; as though man could invent a better way to honour God with, than God Himself hath appointed."—BISHOP LATIMER, 1548.

QUIETLY and calmly the autumn deepened into winter. The cold came early that year; sharp October frost spoiled the beauty of the last flowers of the season, shrivelling heliotropes and verbenas, blackening the dahlias and the lingering hollyhocks, and withering those fuchsias and geraniums which had been left too long unsheltered in the borders. And one morning the inhabitants of the dale awoke, and, lo! the distant mountain peaks and slopes were robed in spotless white, though not as yet had any snow fallen in the green valleys under the lower fells.

The wintry atmosphere did not suit General Seaton; he became weaker, more languid, and continually drowsy. He remained very much in his own apartments, declining to receive visitors, but every day Edith, to whom his heart inclined more and more, and Beatrice spent some time in his upstairs sitting-room. He looked very old—so old that it was difficult to think of him as that bright child's father; and one day Beatrice, as she sat on a stool at his feet, sharing his grapes, looked up in his face, and gazing earnestly, said, "Do you know, I think you are a very old papa? Agnes and Jennie and Phemie's papa is quite young!" which was true, comparatively, for Mr. Clifford, though over forty, was not far from being the General's junior by thirty years.

The General smiled. "Ah, I am an old papa; too old a papa for you, Pussy! But such as I am you must put up with me—while I last—while I last, little one."

Mr. Fabian came pretty frequently to the Hall. He knew it would be more prudent not to meet Edith more often than he could help, especially as the General no longer received him with the cordiality of past years. But, strange to say, this man, who had, as he believed, so sternly disciplined himself, so entirely brought himself both body and soul [under subjection, seemed, on this one point, weak and uncontrolled as a passionate, reckless boy. His greatest terror was lest he should betray this utterly hopeless, unfortunate love, which had surprised him, like a thief in the night; and of all the people with whom he associated he shrank most from Mr. Gerard Newcomb.

Not that there appeared to be anything very terrible about this gentleman. He was only the schoolmaster, you know! and his deportment was singularly meek and respectful. He approached Fabian as his superior; nominally, at least, he took all orders from him, and so far had not in the slightest instance disputed his authority. He issued his commands in "the master's" name, and to "the master" he invariably referred every difficulty. Indeed, Mr. Fabian rather suspected him of creating, from time to time, trivial dilemmas for the mere purpose of making an appeal to the acknowledged powers that be. And yet, with all this voluntary humility, this deferential mien, this entire submission, he was there, in the house that was supposed to be Fabian's, entirely against Fabian's will. He had come uninvited, and he remained unwelcome save by a mere form of words, as unreal as it was compulsory. And more than that: he lived a certain life of his own, apart from his professed duties, independently of all at Malham—a life in which the luckless master of the Tower had not, and was not intended to have, any share.

The credentials which he brought with him, and which were most humbly presented, were accompanied by a sealed letter from the General of the Order, commanding Fabian to receive this guest into his home, and to leave in his hands certain portions of the work doing in the district. Gerard Newcomb was sent to him as "an assistant," a helper in the too arduous undertakings to

which both Fabian and Mrs. Darcy were committed ; but from the very first they silently recognised him for what he really was—a *spy*, an informer, and to a great extent their master ! Altogether, putting one thing with another, Fabian felt more than half inclined to write *Ichabod* over his study-door. And Athanasia, though she exercised all discretion, and presented her usual bland and dignified exterior to the intruder, was secretly ill at ease. As a daughter of Rome, she knew too well what Newcomb's presence at Malham portended.

He quickly made the acquaintance of Mr. Clifford, who told his wife that the new Malham usher was the most rascally-looking fellow he had seen for many a day ! And when next Sunday, for reasons of his own, he chose to make one of the Seatondale congregation, Mrs. Clifford felt constrained to endorse the uncomplimentary opinion. He loitered after service, looking round the little chapel, which was no longer the white-washed, deal-partioned barn of former days ; though truth to tell, it was not even now a particularly attractive edifice, for all it rejoiced in a brand new chancel more than half as large as the original building, with dark oak stalls, stained windows, diapered and gilded walls, and a regular orthodox Anglican *altar* ! The old reading-desk and the high, narrow, box-like pews had also disappeared, and there were other improvements—such as a stone pulpit, a fine font, a costly lectern, and a general air of decoration.

The Seatondalers, though at first pleased with the pageantry which Mr. Fabian introduced, and conscious that they had been terribly behind the rest of the church-going world, had never taken kindly to the alterations in their chapel or in its services. It was just a crank the General had got into his head, they told each other, and it did not become them to express disapprobation, and certainly the chancel was very grand—only, as Mrs. Fluke insisted, “ it never did look as if it belonged to the chapel, and it never seemed home-like and comfortable on Sacrament Sundays.” And in saying so, she expressed the feelings of a great number of her fellow-worshippers.

But when the General awoke as it were from the long trance into which he had fallen, when “ a change came



o'er the spirit of his dream," and he all at once perceived the direction in which he and others about him were drifting; when he began to show his indifference, his dislike even to the many innovations which had stolen in since that bright June day six years ago, when Mr. Fabian had preached his first sermon to the Seatondalers—they were all, with very few exceptions, inclined to follow suit and vote for a return to the old bald form of worship, which had contented them and their forefathers so long. The exotic Anglicanism, though at first to all appearance readily blooming in the primitive Seatondale soil, never actually took root there. The fact was that the plant had been unduly forced by Fabian and his coadjutors, and so it shrivelled and drooped in the first unkindly blast, and pined the moment it was neglected. But for the General's invalided state, it is probable that there might have been a wholesale sweeping away of much that had been introduced of the true spirit of the Anglo-Catholic Church. As it was, one novelty after another disappeared, and there was a general disposition to return to the old paths and usages.

Indeed, there were a few who would have liked to shut up the harmonium, reinstate old Jonas, who still lived to grumble at his iniquitous deposition; together with the bawling untrained choristers—or, as they called themselves, "the singers"—and the flute, fiddles, and bass-viol, which had once been their pride and glory. There were some who would have liked to wall up the entrance to the gaudy chancel.

I said that Mr. Newcomb remained one Sunday morning, after the rest of the congregation had dispersed, looking about him, and taking stock, so to speak, of the aspect and character of the humble little sanctuary, of which he had from time to time heard a good deal. What he saw by no means contented him; what he had heard he largely disapproved of. He lingered till Mr. Clifford came out of the tiny vestry, which was among the recent improvements, and then he walked up to him with an affable air, and with the ordinary salutations.

"I walked over this morning to join in your service,"

he said to the curate. "I had heard so much of the Seatondale celebrations and the Seatondale chapel."

"And you are disappointed?" returned Mr. Clifford. "Mr. Fabian has not been here for some months; he probably is not aware of a few of our latest alterations. You see, Anglicanism did not suit our people; they only tolerated it to please the General, and when he grew tired of the thing they were only too glad to discard many of the practices they disliked."

"But, Mr. Clifford," urged the usher in the most respectful manner—"forgive me if I blunder—I quite understood that *you* were a zealous Anglican priest, determined on restoring to the Church her lost privileges, and her lapsed prerogatives!"

"I fear you were misled. I disclaim the appellation of Anglican priest; I am simply a clergyman of the Church of England, the humble perpetual curate of Seatondale."

"You amaze me. I had heard such a very different account. The church, too—'chapel' I think you call it—by no means comes up to my own expectations as founded on the representations of my patron, Mr. Fabian. How could he make so many mistakes? He has imagined a good deal, and given you credit for the rest, I suppose."

"No; I fancy he has not given much, if any, rein to mere imagination. I should say he has not in the least exaggerated our quondam *semi-Popery*—for it *was* that, you know! We were a set of simpletons, nothing better; we took the Puseyite fever, and we have had it pretty sharply; we are now in a state of convalescence, and hope soon to regain our normal sanitary condition."

Mr. Newcomb looked bewildered.

"I really do not understand," he said, with the air of a lad who is set down to a problem, the proposition of which is quite beyond our grasp.

At that moment Mrs. Clifford made her appearance; she had been waiting outside in the graveyard for her husband, and now she re-entered the chapel to see what had detained him. Mr. Clifford turned to her with a smile she fully comprehended. "Mr. Newcomb has come all the way from Malham, my dear," he said, "expecting quite

a treat in the way of Anglican observances, and he is naturally disappointed. I was just telling him that the semi-Popish customs into which we have been betrayed displease our people, and certainly do not tend to edification, so we have quite decided to get rid of a good many of them. For instance, we used to have a large wooden cross on the Communion table, which, of course, we nicknamed 'altar.' Three weeks ago we removed it, amid general acclamation."

"What have you done with it, may I ask?"

"It was safely bestowed in a shed of our own," replied Mr. Clifford, "but it is terribly in our way. I am sure I do not know how we shall dispose of it. It was suggested that we might sell it a bargain, or even present it to the Roman Catholics at St. Ulpha's yonder; but we do not feel justified in doing this, because, being convinced that the thing set up in our midst was an *idol*, we should err in conniving, as it were, at the continuance of the error. It would be just passing our own sin over to other people. It fills up our peat shed sadly, I am afraid; I think I must ask General Seaton's housekeeper to accommodate it, till we can find out what may be lawfully done with it."

"We settled that yesterday," interrupted Mrs. Clifford, "supposing you did not object, which I know you will not, for we have discovered how we may turn it to good account; make a real blessing of it, and at the same time get rid of the incumbrance without burdening our consciences. We propose to chop the thing up, and distribute it, when the severe weather sets in, among the poorest and oldest persons in the chapelry, for firewood."

"With all my heart," returned her husband. "It will do some good at last. The fine gilding and carving of the thing must be lost, of course, but that does not matter much."

"If one will sacrifice to idols, one must pay the price," said Mrs. Clifford, gravely. "Thank God, the cost is so little! it might have been far otherwise."

But Mr. Gerard Newcomb positively recoiled in horror. His sallow face turned of a greenish hue, his attenuated frame trembled visibly.

"You *cannot* mean it? You will not commit sacri-

lege?" he said, earnestly, his voice sunk to a low, hoarse whisper.

Mr. Clifford looked slightly uneasy.

"Sacrilege is a tremendous sounding word," replied Mrs. Clifford; "but it frequently means very little. In the present case, I am inclined to think it means literally nothing. How can two bars of wood nailed together be worthy of reverence? What is one piece of wood more than another piece of wood? Perhaps the rest of the plank out of which our cross was made was devoted to the basest purposes, or perhaps it was at once burned to make a fire, at which the workman might cook his dinner. That is the way Isaiah puts it, however."

"The prophet referred to idols of the heathen, as you must be aware, madam."

"Idolatry is idolatry wherever it is found. It makes very little difference whether heathens or so-called Christians bow the knee to wood and stone. Only the latter are infinitely more guilty than the former. The heathen have never received the Divine command—'Thou shalt have none other gods but Me.' They do not know that it is written, 'Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image,' and Christians do know,—so much greater then is their sin and shame."

"But the cross, dear madam! Surely the cross on which our Blessed Lord suffered is worthy of deepest reverence?"

"Well, I dare say, if we had the actual cross in our possession we should not dare to touch it profanely; but God was too wise to let us have it, knowing that it would prove rather a stumbling-block than a blessing to creatures who are always more prone to cling to the visible than to the invisible. This is not a question of *the cross*, but of a mere piece of wood, or rather of two pieces of wood joined together cross-wise. I declare to you, sir, that I cannot see more in it—as an object of worship, that is—than in my kitchen table. No, I am not at all afraid of committing the sin of sacrilege; though I fear we have already committed it, to some extent, by setting up an idol in what was supposed to be a holy place."

"You have still a cross, I perceive?" and Mr. New-

comb pointed to the embroidery on the "altar cloth," which had not been taken away.

"It is there to-day for the last time. My husband and the General both thought that it would be unwise to make sweeping changes too suddenly. It is never good to do anything—especially anything which involves the interest of others—hastily or rashly. We have sent to London for a plain simple crimson cloth, a good handsome table-cover, in fact, such as any lady might use in her own household. It is to be of the best material and of a rich deep crimson colour, which we prefer to the ecclesiastical purple; and it is to be without ornament; it may have some fringe around it, I suppose, but certainly nothing more."

"You had candlesticks, too, if I am rightly informed—altar lights?"

"The regular 'altar lights' we never had; the candlesticks of which you speak are to be melted down, and sold, and the money applied to charitable purposes."

Mr. Newcomb shook his head. "It is vain to argue," he said, meekly, looking at the ground as he spoke. "Neither am I the person to undertake an argument. I am no theologian, but I know what I believe; and what I have all my life revered, I must reverence to the end. Only—it does seem to me that you stand on most perilous ground. May I speak as brother to brother, as a younger brother to one older and having authority, and implore you to consider well what you are about to do? You *may* be right, of course—God forbid that I should condemn his lawfully ordained ministers; I who am willing to be the servant of all, and who count myself the least and the lowest in the train of God's worshippers. But, dear sir, it seems to me that I have the Church, the Council, and the whole weight of tradition on my side."

"What Church?" asked the curate.

"What other than the Holy Catholic Church in which scarcely an hour ago you and I and all of us publicly professed our faith? I call myself a Catholic, I hope."

"And I call myself a Protestant."

"Ah! then I cannot join hands with you, Mr. Clifford. I am *not* a Protestant. I count as a terrible mistake—to

put it in the mildest form—the so-called Reformation of the sixteenth century.”

“May I ask, Mr. Newcomb, to what communion you do belong?”

“To that of the Church of England,” replied the usher, with an air of innocent surprise. “My dear sir, you did not suppose I adhered to any of the sects—that I was a *schismatic*?”

“I thought possibly that you adored to the sect of Rome. There is a strong flavour of the Vatican in your remarks.”

“I have the greatest respect for our sister Church of Rome, though I may not profess myself of her communion.”

“Are you in holy orders, may I inquire?”

“I am not. I therefore humbly crave your pardon if I have unwittingly spoken with too much freedom to one who, by his sacred calling, is infinitely above me. I am a simple layman of the Church of England—the only true and undivided Anglo-Catholic Church!”

“Undivided!” said Mrs. Clifford, in a peculiar tone. “My dear sir, you can know nothing about the Church of England, or of the religious questions of the day, if you speak of your unhappy Church as in a state of unity! We claim to be members of the Church; you likewise. Yet we certainly could not work together without quarrelling.”

“I spoke of the Anglo-Catholic Church; I acknowledge no other. And I quite believed that I should find Seaton-dale of one mind with Malham.”

“We were never of one mind with Malham, though we went a long way towards it. It speaks little for our common sense, I must confess, that we allowed ourselves to be so far hoodwinked. I speak for myself, my wife, and I do not hesitate to say for General Seaton also,” said Mr. Clifford, “when I admit so much. But as soon as we distinctly recognised the road we were treading, we paused, and we are now anxious to retrace our steps. It is something to have discovered our mistake.”

“Surely, surely, if it be, indeed, a mistake. But may it not rather be a looking back, after putting the hand to

the plough? And may not some of the lambs of the fold be led astray?"

"They are rather apt to judge for themselves, if that is what you mean," said Mr. Clifford. "I should not like to count how many of my flock have gone over to the Methodists in consequence of the Anglican practices which you uphold. That cross that is to be broken up drove half a dozen away. Whether they will ever come back again is doubtful. I only know the Methodists increase at a steady rate, and they are going to build a new and more convenient chapel in place of their present preaching-room, which is unhealthily overcrowded. I used to regard them with aversion and disdain. I am learning, I believe, to wish them *God speed*."

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## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### THE CODICIL.

"I hear a voice you cannot hear,  
Which says I must not stay;  
I see a hand you cannot see,  
Which beckons me away."

GENERAL SEATON became rapidly more and more infirm. He did not suffer in his general health; he felt little or no pain, and even his old enemy the rheumatism deserted him; but day by day he declined, till it was apparent to all who approached him that his end was drawing near. Dr. Wilson rode over to Seaton several times a week; he could do nothing, but it pleased the General to see him, and hear a little of the news of the county; and now and then Dr. Redmayne of Chalfonts paid him a friendly visit, and brought kind greetings from others in his neighbourhood. It was to the latter he said, "You will soon have to lay me by my Mary, Redmayne. I wonder if it will be before the year closes."

It was December then, and Christmas not far off. The rector of Chalfonts thought it very probable that the General would never see the new year that was so close at hand, and being a conscientious man, he did not reply with any mere common-place of courtesy, but solemnly made answer, "It may be that the Lord will call you ere the new year, dear friend; our times are in His hand."

"Even so," replied the General firmly. "I know my days on earth are nearly ended. I have lived my three-score years and ten; why should I wish to tarry longer? You know what the Psalmist says, 'If by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow.' My life, if it were prolonged, would be a useless one. I should be a burden upon those about me. I thank God, who is calling me home so speedily."

"It delights me to find you in so blessed a frame of mind," returned Dr. Redmayne, wondering greatly what had wrought this marvellous change in the stern old soldier's spirit. If Anglicanism had done this, why, then, he must perforce give Anglicanism its due. The General used to be impatient, haughty, and apt to garnish his discourse with un-Christian expletives; he hardly seemed like the proud man he had known so many years. General Seaton must have divined what was passing in the mind of his visitor, for he said, after a short pause, "I dare say you are wondering what has come over me, what has brought me into a frame of mind so blessed. I can scarcely tell you—I hardly know myself. I think it was during my illness in the summer that God first spoke to my soul, and showed me that I was a guilty sinner, and that I needed pardon as much as any wretched criminal who had forfeited his life to his country's laws. And then I had some talk with our dear friend, Mrs. Clifford. For the first time in my existence I opened my heart to a fellow-creature on the subject of personal religion. It would have been well for me had I done so sooner; but I have been a proud, pragmatistical fellow, I am afraid—the good Lord pardon me! Then Edith Armstrong was sent to me, a mere girl, to do me good, to comfort my poor, sinking heart, and to point out to me more clearly the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world."



"It was not, then, the ministrations of Mr. Fabian that roused your conscience? It was not the Anglicanism you have set up here that gave you this confidence and peace?"

"Most emphatically, no! I tell you, Redmayne, this Anglicanism, or Puseyism, or whatever it may be called, is the worst *ism* we ever had amongst us, because it is the most specious. I know it now for what it really is. It is simply rank Romanism in disguise. I feel enraged, and at the same time humbled, when I remember how I suffered myself to be led away from the safe old paths. What a *cat's paw* I have been made in the service of the Jesuits!"

"You do not surely mean seriously to insinuate that our friend at Malham is a Jesuit? He is extremely pronounced, I am aware—goes too far, quite too far, you know. I have told him so plainly, and warned him that the road he has taken leads direct to Rome."

"I would rather say nothing about Fabian. To his own Master he must stand or fall. We are not friends as we were; I have lost confidence in him, and I regret exceedingly that Malham Tower is as good as sold to him. I granted him such a lease that he cannot be dispossessed. Nor is that all. I appointed him my executor, and guardian to my child during her minority."

"The dickens you have!" was Dr. Redmayne's very unclerical rejoinder. Though he had put the question so guardedly, he had himself some very serious suspicions about this clergyman at Malham, which he, being a marvel of prudence, had never disclosed, even to the wife of his bosom. He had said once to James Musgrave, of the Holt Farm, that he thought Fabian was upon the brink of "going over," and that it was, in his opinion, the only *honest* and manly course he could take. And James Musgrave, who generally saw farther than most people, and who seldom spake unadvisedly with his lips, quietly replied—"Are you sure that he has not 'gone over' long ago? Are you sure that any 'going over' at any time was ever necessary? Should we not, speaking of him, instead of Anglo-Catholic say *Roman* Catholic? Has he not far more to do with Pio Nono than with his Grace of Canterbury?"

And Dr. Redmayne thought of these words, and of others of similar import, as he sat now by the arm-chair of General Seaton, and heard him say that his child heiress and her large estates would be at the mercy of this man, who might, or might not, be a veritable Jesuit, but who was certainly a traitor to the National Church, under whose ægis he sheltered himself and his strange doings. Dr. Redmayne was not an Evangelical by any means, still less was he a Broad Churchman, though he venerated the memory of the great Arnold; he was of that very common type of Episcopal clergyman, which prevailed so widely twenty, or perhaps it would be more correct to say thirty, years ago. He was a good man according to his lights; he was what people then called "a sound Churchman." He read prayers, he preached orthodox discourses of twenty minutes twice every Sunday; he was particular over the services; he liked that all things should be done decently and in order; and he had a fine musical ear and good taste. He duly and rightly administered the sacraments of Baptism and the Supper of the Lord; he admonished his young people, and was declared to be "awfully strict," when at regular intervals the Bishop held a confirmation at Chalfonts, in the grand old Priory Church. He was kind to the poor, affable to all his parishioners, a favourite with the gentry, with whom he consorted on equal terms, being a man of family and of large means as well as a beneficed clergyman of the Church of England. He was fond of literature, and he was not averse to field sports when they did not interfere with duty. He was a Tory in politics, with just a touch of Liberalism, to which he did not often confess; and he was avowedly the foe of poachers, homœopathists, and *Dissenters*.

"But you don't mean to say that the instrument which conveys this power to Fabian—absolute power, perhaps! for he got over you completely somehow—that this instrument exists at this present moment? Because—because——"

"If I should go to-night, the will—my last will and testament—drawn up, sealed, signed, and openly attested five years ago, will stand good in law, and it will be impossible to upset it in part or in whole, except under extra-

ordinary circumstances and at immense expense. That is just how the matter stands. I ought to have attended to it before; but it gave me so keen a pain, this distrust of Fabian, and I felt so weak and weary, that, from time to time, I put off doing the thing I ought to have done many months ago. I waited till I should be a little stronger. Now I know that will never be in this world."

"Forgive me; but there is no time to be lost. You do not fear to face death; therefore, I do not hesitate to tell you that it is quite possible the end *may* come very suddenly. Should you not immediately set your house in order?"

"I should! I will! Could you not contrive to bring Threlkeld over with you in a day or two? I will dictate to him the new will, for which I have now and then jotted down in pencil a few rough notes, for I could not trust my memory. Some days it is clear as it ever was, but occasionally it fails so entirely that I remember nothing, and should even forget the child's existence if I did not see her. It is a sort of haze that steals over my faculties, I think, rather than mere loss of memory—a sort of stupor that benumbs my senses."

Dr. Redmayne shook his head. "My dear friend, it all proves that you should act at once, and most decisively. It used to trouble you years back that, being childless, these broad lands of Seatondale, and the immense wealth which you have accumulated, should revert to the Roman Catholic heir-at-law. The danger is not, I am afraid, much less at present! If Fabian and his party have sole legal possession of your little daughter during her minority, they will assuredly make a Papist of her, and marry her to a Papist."

The General groaned. "And young Aubrey would only have inherited the land and the mines. I should have left the rest of my possessions—my manifold investments, all my personal estates—elsewhere. Some of it would have gone to the Damerels, though they are neither kith nor kin of mine; some of it would have gone to hospitals, orphan asylums, missions, or anything else, so that it did not fall into the greedy clutches of Rome. Little did I think that I should ever live to see my own dear old Church of Eng-

land opening the door to Popery! I have a great mind to ordain that the child shall be brought up a Primitive Methodist, or a Quaker, or anything that will tend utterly to disconnect her with the Romanising party, which I see will, in a few years, get the upper hand in the Establishment."

"Nay, nay! that is unnecessary. The Primitives are not by any means people of your daughter's rank in life. It would never answer—*never*. Being guarded from Anglican influences, she cannot do better than grow up in the faith of her Mother Church. A moderate High Churchwoman is what she ought to be."

Now the General was just going to ask Dr. Redmayne to allow his name to be put in place of Fabian's; but that speech checked him. "A moderate High Churchwoman!" That was just what he dreaded. The rector of Chalfonts was no doubt a moderate High Churchman; but who could say, as time went on, how high he would go? Might he not, having yielded a little, go higher and still higher, till he should at last—as Anthony Trollope puts it—"topple over into the cesspool of Rome"?

It was a serious question—who should be Beatrice's guardian? Mr. Clifford, though in himself trustworthy, was certainly *not* the person; Mrs. Clifford, if she had been of the superior gender, would have served his turn; but as it was, the husband and wife could in no way be dissevered. There was Dr. Wilson; he *might* do!—yet only as a *pis aller*. He was a good doctor; but, apart from his profession, absent, dull, and inexperienced in the great world's ways—not at all fitted to superintend the education and the affairs of one of the first heiresses in the country. There was the Duke, and there was his kindly Duchess. Would *he* object to Beatrice as his ward? The General thought not; the Seaton blood was as good as his own, and rich men do not often refuse to accept the guardianship of other rich men's orphans. There were reasons, however, why the General would have preferred to choose Dr. Redmayne rather than his Grace, and he would certainly have there and then made proposals which the doctor would as certainly have accepted, but for that unlucky speech about a moderate High Churchism!

The poor General felt singularly weak and helpless, and he chid himself that he had not sooner settled this most important question of Beatrice's guardianship. He resolved to think steadfastly over the idea which had flashed across his mind in reference to the Duke of Aldinghame, whose Duchess had so truly loved his gentle Mary; only, alas! thinking was now not quite so easy. As a rule, if he began to *think* upon any subject whatever he fell asleep, and when he awoke had but the most confused remembrances of his previous reflection. Sometimes he could not even recal what had occupied his mind before that deep slumber overpowered him. This was a sort of lucid interval; he felt strangely clear in mind, and more widely awake, both mentally and physically, than he had been for long. "When do you think you could come over with Threlkeld?" he asked presently.

"I am afraid to promise for to-morrow. We cannot be sure that Threlkeld may not have some other engagement."

"If it is not for a dying man bid him throw it over. Men with their lives before them can afford to wait; I cannot. I yearn to settle this business, and be at rest. Then—my mind being at ease about Beatrice, having done for her all I can—I shall leave her with full confidence in God's hands. He is the Father of the fatherless, and He will protect her. Then I shall just lie down quietly, and sing my '*Nunc Dimittis*,' and wait till the Great Commander bids me strike my tent and march over Jordan."

"I am afraid, even if I returned immediately, I could not see Threlkeld to-day. Shall we say the day after to-morrow?"

"If it cannot be sooner; I should have liked it to be to-morrow; I should have liked it to be to-day, indeed. And that reminds me—I did—I don't remember when exactly—draw up what I *thought* might be a codicil; but it is neither signed nor attested."

"So much waste paper, then! But why not complete it this very hour? You are quite yourself just now, stronger, you say, than usual. Where is this codicil, and what are its provisions?"

"They are what do not satisfy me; but they are better than none at all. Listen! when I first felt sure that

Fabian was not *sound* in the faith, when I first recognised to what issues his movement was leading us, I became most uneasy about my child. And yet, so deep and so true had been my friendship for that man, that I could not all at once determine to set him aside, for he knew all about my will as well as I knew it myself. I resolved on a compromise; I thought I would not leave him sole guardian, I would join with him in equal authority Mrs. Clifford and Edith Armstrong. I could not leave Mrs. Clifford sole guardian, you know, because I should not wish her husband to have any control; and I could not place Edith in so responsible a position, because she is quite too young. But jointly with another, and that other a man, I thought it might answer. Any way, Fabian could not exercise an absolute authority; and if he refused to act in conjunction with the two ladies, why then they must choose some other person to share their responsibilities. I have distinctly said so in this *quasi* codicil. You shall see it. It is not good for much, but it would be better than nothing in case of the worst—I mean in case of my death before another will could be drawn up and legally completed."

"It would be worth a good deal if it were only signed and witnessed. Do you not think you had better sign it at once? I can witness it, of course, and one of your servants can witness also. Either Mrs. Jelfie or Mr. Viner I should say. It is rather an informal piece of business, I confess, but properly completed, I doubt not that the deed would stand as a true codicil in any court of law. What do you say?"

"By all means! It will be useless as soon as I have signed the new will; but it will not take five minutes to sign; give me my gold pen and ring the bell, please."

In answer, the valet Antony appeared. "Call Mrs. Jelfie and Viner, and come yourself, and be quick about it! Don't let Jelfie stop to put on her best cap."

In five minutes the servants had assembled, Dr. Redmayne had placed the paper before the General, who, with his spectacles on, and with his trembling, nervous hand, waited to sign once more the name which he might sign again nevermore. He explained briefly, "I wish

you *all* to understand this is a codicil to my will which was made years ago. I intend to make a fresh will confirming the former disposition of my property, but revoking the guardianship of your young mistress, my daughter. This codicil is a sort of compromise between the old existing will and the new will, which is not yet framed; it adds to the number of the child's guardians. Being a woman-child, I think she ought to have women-guardians, as the male person whose ward I have made her is unmarried, and likely to remain so. The persons I now appoint are Mrs. Emily Clifford and Miss Edith Armstrong. You will now witness my signature, and testify that I was in sound mind when I wrote it. There it is—'William Seaton.' Dr. Redmayne, be good enough to sign, and then I think Viner had better sign! There! that is a legal document now, I suppose; two respectable witnesses attesting my signature, and two others being present, and willing to bear testimony if required. They will all be silent on this business till they are called upon to speak."

The servants withdrew, and then the General said, "I feel so much more at my ease; but I shall not be really content till I have signed the other will, which is to render invalid the former one, and to make needless this codicil. It strikes me, the first sheets of the old will might remain intact, for they refer entirely to the property. But Threlkeld will know, I never was much of a lawyer. Thank you, Redmayne, for your advice and your assistance; it is a wonderful relief that I have done something, though not what I would wish."

"If you have quite decided to erase Fabian's name as guardian, why mention it at all in the codicil?"

"I had not so decided when I wrote that paper which is to stand *pro tempore* as codicil; and now I am rather uncertain whom I shall mention. Some gentlemen should be joined with the two ladies."

"Most certainly. I hold womankind in the highest esteem; I have a great respect for Mrs. Clifford, who is worth two of her husband any day, and I hear Miss Armstrong well spoken of in most reliable quarters. She is a born gentlewoman, though placed as a governess. Still I

should be very sorry to behold Seatondale entirely under petticoat government."

"Priests wear petticoats as well as women, I had not thought of that. After all, if I die to-night, Seatondale will be altogether under petticoat rule, for what is Fabian's long coat but a sort of petticoat? Oh, dear, what an old fool I am!"

"My dear friend, do not be distressed. You have, under the circumstances, done the best thing you could do, which is satisfactory as far as it goes. The day after to-morrow (D.V.) we will do a far better thing. I will lose no time in hunting out Threlkeld, and I will explain to him what you wish, so that no time may be wasted. Try and make up your mind whom you will appoint in Fabian's stead. I will do all I can to save you trouble in every way. Threlkeld will soon draw up the document you require; you have but to sign, and the same witnesses will do."

"No, they will not! Viner, at least, cannot sign, for I have left him—in the will—an annuity, and Mrs. Jeliffe also. Threlkeld had better bring his clerk. I wish it were done."

And so they parted, intending to meet again in eight-and-forty hours. But God willed it otherwise. Dr. Redmayne never more saw his honoured friend in life. He kept his appointment faithfully, but he gazed on the face of the dead.



## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## THE BRIDEGROOM COMETH.

"I come, I come at Thy command,  
I give my spirit to Thy hand;  
Stretch forth Thine everlasting arms,  
And shield me in the last alarms.  
The hour of my departure's come,  
I hear the voice that calls me home.  
Now, O my God, let trouble cease;  
Now let Thy servant die in peace."

On the next day General Seaton felt so well that he invited a party of friends to dine with him. Not any affair of state and ceremony, of course, only Mr. and Mrs. Clifford, Beatrice, and Edith, who were to share his two o'clock repast. "I meant to have you all as usual on Christmas-day," he said; "but I am beginning to feel as if I must not count upon next week any longer, not even on to-morrow; and as I am so bright and strong just now, and able to enjoy your society, I hope you will come, and waive the informality which invites you only four hours before your dinner is on the table. And," he added earnestly, "I have something to say to you; bring Phemie and Jennie with you; and when they have had their dessert, we will send them away to have their games in the schoolroom."

"I have not seen you looking so well since the spring, General," said Mr. Clifford, to whom he was speaking. "We will come with pleasure; I can answer for my wife, and our little girls will be delighted; it is their greatest treat to spend a day with Beatrice." "You look as if you had taken quite a fresh lease of life. Your voice is strong, and there is a fire in your eye I have not seen for many a day. You are decidedly better; this frosty weather suits you; it gives me twinges in the shoulder, to remind me, I suppose, that I am 'getting on,'—am beginning to go down the hill, in fact. And Emily tells me some-

times, when I tell her she is overtiring herself, that she is not so young as she was!"

"Ah, my friend, we all find out that secret sooner or later. Youth deepens into middle age, and middle age mellows into old age, so slowly as it seems, because imperceptibly, and yet how swiftly! It appears but the other day that I brought my bride here. I was thinking of it as I lay awake in the night. The past is wonderfully like a dream, when one looks back through the dim vista of departed years,—vivid in certain details, yet shadowy as a whole."

The early dinner passed off very well. Mr. Clifford carved, and Mrs. Clifford headed the table. The General enjoyed his invalid soup and his little bit of pheasant, and even asked for a share of Beatrice's tapioca pudding. Then came the dessert, and pleasant desultory conversation, in which the little girls bore their part, till at length the General said, "Now, Beatrice, take your young friends to the schoolroom, and you can order coffee to be served to you there when you like. You must do without Edith—I cannot spare her this afternoon."

The children went away well pleased; the little Cliffords knowing what treasures of dolls and dolls' clothes and dolls' houses and dolls' furniture Beatrice possessed.

Left to themselves, the elders drew round the fire; strange to say, the General was disinclined for his afternoon nap; he had been wide awake, he averred, ever since Dr. Redmayne's visit on the day before.

"And I do hope I shall keep wakeful till this time to-morrow," he continued, tapping his jewelled snuff-box, the gift of a royal personage nearly fifty years before. "I want to have all my senses about me, for I am going to set up a *new will*!"

All were silent: it was difficult to make any rejoinder.

The General proceeded: "I wish to speak to you on a painful subject, more painful, perhaps, than any one guesses, for John Fabian was dear to me as a son—*was*, do I say? He is still dear; I cannot think of him but kindly and tenderly, though I fear—I do fear he has been false to me and mine, from the beginning! It is in sorrow, genuine sorrow, not in anger, that I decide to leave

my daughter to other guardianship. Fabian in himself I believe I could trust; his is a noble nature, warped and vitiated, *forced*, as it seems to me, into uncongenial baseness; but he will be true to the cause to which he is sworn. If he be not already a Papist, he will soon be one, and I cannot let a Romanist or a Romaniser bear rule in my place. To use a common and very foolish expression, I could not rest in my grave, if Beatrice were won over to the errors I detest!"

"Is the will which appoints Mr. Fabian guardian and executor still in existence?" asked Mrs. Clifford.

"It is; but it will be destroyed to-morrow."

"Oh! that you would destroy it to-night!" pleaded Mrs. Clifford, earnestly. "If you died intestate it would not matter so very much, would it? All you have—lands, houses, mines, securities, and what not—must be your child's; there is no one to dispute her claim, and plenty of friends who would take care that she had her rights. It would be far better she should be a ward in Chancery than Mr. Fabian's ward. Do burn to-night the will which is to be cancelled to-morrow."

"I will think of it. I do not like destroying it till it is superseded. But there is something else that I must tell you, because it concerns both you ladies; I have drawn up a sort of codicil, which yesterday I signed, in the presence of witnesses—Dr. Redmayne and Viner—Mrs. Jelfe and Antony being also in the room. That document, though informal, will be good in point of law, and it constitutes Emily Clifford and Edith Armstrong joint guardians of the *person* of my sole child and heiress, Beatrice Mary Seaton."

"Not joint guardians with Mr. Fabian, I hope?" said Edith, in a low voice.

"Yes, at this present moment! it will not be so to-morrow. I have thought of committing the guardianship of the estates—and of the child herself, to some extent—to the Duke of Aldinghame, if he will undertake the trust, as I doubt not he will. Should he refuse, it must be Dr. Redmayne. He will be master of Beatrice's fortune, you two ladies will be mother and sister to her, during her minority, and for long afterwards I trust. I will that

Beatrice lives here ; that the present establishment is kept up ; that Edith lives with her as friend, companion, and governess ; that nothing shall be done as regards Beatrice herself without the full consent of both Edith Armstrong and Emily Clifford."

"But Miss Armstrong may marry?" said Mr. Clifford.

"In that case, she must keep Beatrice with her till she is twenty-one, or till she marries, and she is not to marry without consent of her three guardians. I should be very sorry to doom Edith to perpetual maidenhood ; of course she will marry. In my early days, she would not have been allowed to write herself *spinster* so long, but in this degenerate age the young fellows have little sense, and still less taste. But, my dear, if it can be contrived, your husband must live at Seatondale with you—he must come to you ; it is so sometimes."

"There is no prospect of my marriage," said Edith, very quietly. "Long ago, I cared for somebody, but it could not be ; and now it will never be—we are strangers as though we had never met."

"Was it money—or the lack of it, rather—that separated you?"

"No ; antagonistic creeds ! I do not regret that I sent him away ; there was, in fact, nothing else to be done. I have said so much, because I thought you would like to know how little danger there is of my being tempted away from Beatrice ; but, please, let us say no more."

And no more was said. But the General went on explaining his wishes, and making Edith take notes where-with to refresh his memory on the morrow, when he would have to give final instructions to Mr. Threlkeld.

The ladies did not at all like their association with Mr. Fabian ; but as he would probably never know of it, as the Duke or Dr. Redmayne would stand in his place next day, it seemed selfish and unkind to make any demur. The General was wonderfully brisk, and his mind seemed as clear and his memory as vigorous as it had ever been. Edith had never seen him to such advantage ; he had so much to say, so many injunctions to give, so many trifles to remember, and he spoke of bygone days, and referred to his military experiences, and he sent for an old jewel

casket, and gave Edith and Mrs. Clifford some valuable ornaments, which had been Lady Sarah's. "Beatrice will have the family heir-looms, and her mother's jewels, of course," he said; "only this diamond keeper, which I have worn since Mary's death, you must take, and wear for both our sakes, Mrs. Clifford. And here is a carved coral necklace with pendant; it was much admired once, and I dare say it could be altered to suit the present fashion. Take it, please, for your bonnie Agnes; I wish she had been here to-day; give it to her with my love, and tell her to wear it in memory of me."

"Thank you, so much; Agnes will prize it greatly. I should have liked her to come with us, but she and I seldom leave home together. She is the house-mother when I am absent; we have not a staff of servants, and the little ones want continual attention."

"Ah! I ought to have improved your income years ago, Clifford; but you will find I have not forgotten you; your name is in the old will. That is one reason why I do not care to burn it till the new one is a positive fact! Your name is there, and your wife's also, and there are legacies—only small ones—for Agnes and Edgar; the lad's will be enough to take him through the University, but don't let him go to Oxford. The Romanisers are not strong at Cambridge, and I like Cambridge best, though Oxford stands first, no doubt. I was a Cantab myself, you know, and I would not send a boy of my own to Oxford, not to ensure his being made Prime Minister! Agnes' money will serve for a modest marriage portion. I like every girl to have her *dot*. And, Clifford, Edith has a list of books, which I think would be useful to you; your library is not overstocked, I know."

"It is much larger than that of many a poor country curate, thanks to your generosity," returned Mr. Clifford. "But, dear General, I trust it will be some time yet before we inherit these bequests of yours."

The General shook his head. "It will not be long, Clifford. Something seems to say to me, 'Behold the Bridegroom cometh!' And I think—I think I have oil in my lamp, and it is trimmed and burning; thanks be to God who giveth me the victory through our Lord Jesus

Christ! I would I had done more work for Him! It comforts me, though, to know that I may yet serve Him—how and where I cannot tell; but I know—I know I shall go on marching under His standard through all eternity. Dear friends, work while it is day; and oh! ask the Lord to teach you—to keep you from the darkness that is gathering about our beloved English Church. I don't think of the Dissenters as I did—how could I, with Edith at my side? It was all pride and ignorance. I had up my old Methodist gardener this morning, and I shook hands with him, and promised to look for him in heaven; and he promised to serve his young mistress as faithfully as he has served me—I cannot remember how many years."

"Should you like to receive the Sacrament on Christmas-day?" asked Mr. Clifford—"you, Edith, ourselves, and all the servants who are communicants?"

"I should like it of all things," he answered, brightly—"if I am here, that is. I should like to take the cup of blessing once more, and call upon the name of the Lord; once more, in communion with my friends, to commemorate my Saviour's dying love. But I think it will not be: I shall not drink of that wine till I drink it new in my Father's kingdom. And remember, Clifford—and I say it as if this hour were my last—I believe no more in Sacramental grace: the bread and the wine are mere symbols. I wish that pretence of Consecration could be done away with. The Dissenters are happy in that they are not compelled to utter that with their lips which their heart and conscience disavow. Still! don't forget, I die in the communion of the Church of England, as by law established. I love her Liturgy as a whole, though I should like it revised and amended—purged of the lurking Popery that is in it, and that *must* breed mischief. Yes! I love my poor old Church—God help her! I think He will not forsake her while still she numbers among her children those who have not bowed the knee to the Baal of to-day—and—" his voice deepened, and his face wore a strange solemnity—"let us pray, day and night, in the words of Chrysostom, '*Granting us in this world the knowledge of Thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting.*' His truth! Ah! we shall never know it all here!—we can

only get glimpses of it below ; it will take eternity to show us the fulness and the glory of God's truth."

And then he seemed tired, and dropped asleep in his usual fashion ; but his slumbers were calm and restful ; and as they watched him they thought how much better he was, and that he surely would be spared to them a little longer. Only Edith thought that the peace on those aged brows was something more than the peace of those who are still to be pilgrims and strangers on earth. It was getting late when the Cliffords went away, for they waited till the General woke, refreshed and in excellent spirits. "Thank you for all your kindness to an old man," he said, as they bade him good night. "I shall tell my Mary how good you have been to me, Emily !"

When Edith had seen Beatrice in bed, she returned to the General for a few minutes' talk before he rang for Antony. He was still bright and joyous, and as she sat down he said, "I am so happy, my dear ; so very happy ! I never felt anything like it in my life ; no ! not even when I gained my first victory ; not when my sovereign publicly paid me grateful compliments at St. James's ! And I feel as if my Mary were very near me, as if we should soon clasp hands again and look into each other's eyes once more. And you will be true to my little one always ? I need not ask you, but it comforts me to hear your assurance."

"Always ! always ! I promise. God do so unto me, and more also, if ever I wilfully forsake Beatrice Seaton."

"And if I should not see Fabian again, tell him that I cherished no anger against him. Tell him I blessed him and prayed for him to the last. Also charge him, as my dying message, that he free himself from the deadly snares that compass him about. Bid him, in my name, cast away his refuge of lies, and seek help and strength from the living God. Tell him I know more than he imagines I do ; I know he is a traitor to truth, to honour, to common honesty. Do not shrink ! tell him that I bade you say so. And may the good Lord grant him repentance, and forgiveness of all his sins, and bring him at last to His eternal joy."

"Would you not like to talk to him yourself, General ?

Your words would have greater weight than mine, even though they came from you. After you have seen and settled all with Mr. Threlkeld and rested, why not send for Mr. Fabian? He will come at once, I know."

"Yes, he will come—*poor Fabian!* I wonder if anything like prophecy is granted sometimes to dying people? an open vision rather, and seeing beyond the present and the visible into that which is to come? To-night I seem to know all about Fabian; I know what he is, what he has been ever since I first saw his face; I know that in my house, and at my side, he has played the part of *Judas!* And I know, too, that great sorrow and suffering is before him; a fiery trial awaits him, though of what nature I cannot guess; but he will come out of it cleansed and purified. Through much tribulation shall he enter into the kingdom of God. He and I will meet again on the steps of Christ's throne, and we shall be friends together once more. No; I shall not in the flesh see Fabian again. Tell him all I have said—all, please!"

"I will try to remember every word, and to repeat it all in the spirit of your own utterance. Yet I shall still hope that you and he may have at least one more interview."

"No, my dear! A voice has said to me within the last hour, 'Behold the Bridegroom cometh.' I thought I heard it before, but was not sure—when I awoke from my sleep I knew that I was not deceived—

"The hour of my departure's come,  
I hear the voice that calls me home."

Thank the Lord, it is *Home!* and the voice that calls is the voice of Jesus. I am not afraid?"

"Tell me," said Edith, deeply touched, "how does it feel to come close to death? what is death like?"

"Like a good angel who heralds my Saviour's coming to receive me unto Himself, that where He is there I may be also. I am going into the unknown—what of that? Christ will be there. My child is ready to go anywhere with me, because she trusts me; shall not I trust Him who never yet failed any? As for the grave! I shall not be there any more than I am now; the grave holds only dust



and ashes. I myself—my *ego*, you know—will have put on immortality! Child, there is nothing to fear in death; at the right time it comes as naturally as bed-time and sleep after a tiring long day. Now, good night, dear; you are looking pale, and I am weary. Kiss me before you go! kiss me on the lips, as if you were my own daughter, and a daughter you have keen to me, Edith."

She bent down and kissed him; she thought his lips were very cold, and the kiss he gave her was feeble and tremulous; but then she had never kissed so old a person before. She wished him "Good night," and went away. She sat up till midnight, and then Viner came to her door, whispering, "I am going to sit up with him, ma'am, and I thought you would like to know. If there's any change before morning, you shall be called."

"Do you think there *will* be a change, Viner?"

"I don't know, ma'am; but it won't be long. There's death in his face, if I ever saw it on any man's. Mrs. Jeliffe will hold herself in readiness, Antony and I keeping watch."

Edith did not undress; she made up her fire and drew the sofa to the hearth, and wrapping herself up, tried to sleep. And at last she did sleep soundly; and it seemed but a few minutes from the time the clock struck two till some one came knocking at her door. She sprang up and opened it: it was Mrs. Jeliffe, who only said, "He's going, Miss Edith; he's going!" It was five o'clock then, and Edith went at once to the General's chamber. And there he lay, the grand old man, on his pillows, quietly and peacefully passing away from earth. His faithful servants were gathered round his bed. He was quite conscious, but past speaking, except in disjointed, gasping whispers. As Edith stood by him he smiled, and his lips formed the word "*pray!*"

"He wants prayer," said Mrs. Jeliffe; "I've sent for Mr. Clifford."

"We won't wait for t' parson," said the Methodist gardener; "we can any on us pray to t' Lord. He hears t' lowliest o' His children." And at once he knelt down.

And this was the prayer of the old Methodist, who was himself not far from threescore years and ten:—"O Lord

God! our Father, our best Friend! we ask Thee noo to take to Theeself t' soul o' our dear master, General Seaton. We do believe as Thou hast pardoned all his sins, that they be all washed away in t' blood o' t' Lamb. We do believe that he's accepted in t' Beloved. Wherefore, oh! most merciful God, receive his soul! Let an aboonding entrance be meenistered unto him in this solemn hour—the entrance into glory! Bewi' him now, dear Lord! gie him strength in this last conflict; go wi' him wheer we canna go. Close his eyes on things o' earth, and let him open 'em in t' gowden streets of t' new Jerooselem! Jesus, Lord! coom quickly and take our master to Thy ain Sel', for ever and ever, for Thy Namesake, and according to t' promise Thou hast gi'en to a' Thy bairns. Amen."

That was all; it was enough. A few minutes more, and the grey tint upon the noble old face deepened, the heavy eyelids quivered, the cold hands that had been feebly clasped in the attitude of prayer fell apart; sigh slowly followed sigh, and every sigh they knew was a parting, dying breath; and then, just at the last, as they watched the expiring flicker of that mysterious spark of mortal life, they heard him say distinctly, "The Bridegroom! I come, my Lord; I come."

And for the last time in this world, the old soldier obeyed orders.

When the Cliffords came he lay cold and majestic in the sleep that knows no waking on this side the grave. The dead face was gravely, beautifully serene, and on the quiet brows rested the impress of that peace which the world giveth not—the peace that passeth understanding.

"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

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## CHAPTER XXXV.

## BETWEEN THE ACTS.

DEEP and solemn was the shadow that fell upon Seaton-dale that winter day when far and wide it came to be known that the General was no more. The tolling bell, the darkened windows of the Hall, the grave looks of those servants who were abroad that morning, told what had happened during the silence of the long December night. The villagers gathered round the doors and in the wide, low kitchen of the "Golden Lion," and most genuine, though somewhat uncouthly worded, were the expressions of sorrow and regret which fell from the lips of the rough, hardy dalesmen, over whom for nearly half a century their grand old General had reigned as king and master. Of course, they acknowledged themselves to be subjects of Her Majesty Queen Victoria, but she was little more to them than an empty name. She governed the country somehow, they supposed, though they never saw her face or heard her voice : on festive occasions they always drank to her health and long life, and they liked to sing "God save the Queen," whenever fitting opportunity arose. The sentiment of loyalty had been duly inculcated among them from generation to generation, and they had probably never even heard of such a thing as Republicanism, and would have scouted it if they had ; and yet, notwithstanding this outward show of allegiance to the monarch, their real Sovereign was General Seaton, and they had a vague idea that the Queen had graciously appointed him to govern Seaton-dale and its outlying districts in her stead.

The morning was not far advanced when Edith and Mrs. Clifford bethought themselves of the old will, which was, after all, the only will, and of the codicil, which associated them with the man whom, of all others, they would have avoided.

"Edith," said Mrs. Clifford, as soon as Beatrice, who

had fairly wept herself to sleep, could be left in charge of her maid, "what shall we do? It seems to me that we must either act in conjunction with Mr. Fabian, or refuse entirely to fulfil our dear friend's last request."

"I have just been thinking the same thing," replied Edith. "We are placed in a most uncomfortable dilemma, though I, for my part, cannot draw back. I promised the General that I would never leave Beatrice; I promised it last night, after you went away. It was like a *vow*! I meant it for one, and he took it so, I am nearly certain. No, come what may, I must never, by any act or deed of my own, desert the child. The terms of the codicil provide that I should be always with her. Mr. Fabian may vex and annoy, but he cannot separate us. I would give all I have had the question of guardianship been otherwise settled, but as the past is irrevocable, I must make the best of the present and the future. And how about yourself?"

"I have not made up my mind; I must consult with my husband. I shall tell Mr. Fabian when he comes that I am uncertain whether I shall act with him and you or not. Nothing can be settled till after the funeral; everything may well be left in abeyance till then."

"It would be a great comfort to me to think that we should be associated in this trust. I am not sure how the law stands, but it strikes me that if you refuse to act, some other person will have to be appointed in your place. And it may be that the power of appointing a third guardian will rest with Mr. Fabian, who, of course, will choose some one upon whom he can depend for the furtherance of his own designs. We may even have Madlle. Annette here again."

"God forbid! But tell me, Edith, tell me candidly, do you believe Mr. Fabian to be a Jesuit—a priest of Rome under Anglican disguise?"

"I do believe that he is a priest of Rome, and in all probability a Jesuit. I do believe that he will strain every nerve and work unceasingly to gain Seatondale, its heiress, and its revenues, for his Church. But—you will think it strange, I know—there is something in the man himself which gives me hope. I should not be surprised to see

him *some day* fighting on our side, taking up the cross of Christ, and laying aside the crucifix. He is in great darkness; he is bound hand and foot, body and soul, by the cruel policy of Rome, who knows that if her children are once allowed to think for themselves, her empire is shaken, and her strongest holds may be assailed; and yet I feel sure that in his soul is a glimmering of light. What is to hinder that God's Spirit should not strive mightily with this man, and show him all the truth, and bring him at last out of the dungeon into the glorious free sunshine?"

"Edith, take care what you are about. Do not, I beseech you, attempt any parley with John Fabian. Do not enter into any sort of argument with him; do not listen for one moment to his sophistries. If he were simply a Roman Catholic, like Father Sullivan at St. Ulpha's, I would not care; I should not hold him in such utter detestation. But it is his imposture I dislike; it is his fraud which excites my anger. Why does he linger here, a professed clergyman of the Church of England, when he has already concluded terms with Rome?"

"Probably, he cannot help himself, unless he sever all connection with the Church to which he doubtless belongs. The imposition is detestable, I grant; but it is possible that he may believe that he is doing God service. I wonder if he really was an Anglican when first he came among you."

"It is impossible to say. But that he has been ordained a clergyman of the Church of England, and that he is in priests' orders, we are positive, because there is his name—'John Fabian,' in the 'Clergy List.'"

"I wonder what bishop ordained him?"

"The Bishop of Exeter, I believe; but I am not certain. He was always, from the first, singularly—I am uncharitable enough to say *suspiciously*—reticent concerning his life and experiences previous to his arrival here."

"How *did* he come here? I have been on the point of asking you a hundred times. Once the dear General was going to tell me all about him, and then he was interrupted, and another opportunity never came."

"He came here with young Aubrey Seaton, who used

to be called 'the Popish heir' before Beatrice was born. He is connected with the Southerleigh Seaton. I don't exactly know how, or in what degree; but the General understood. So that you see he is actually the person he claims to be. Had he not arrived here in company with Seaton, I should have greatly doubted his being a Fabian at all. And I saw enough of Aubrey Seaton to convince me that he was not in the least likely to lend himself to base imposture. Why he has never come near us again, I cannot think; we all took to him, Romanist as he was, and prejudiced as we were against him."

"It was strange, though, that he and Mr. Fabian should be associated. I suppose it was the relationship which existed between them. Do you really mean that Mr. Aubrey Seaton first introduced this man to the General?"

"I do mean it certainly, for it is the truth. Aubrey wrote a letter to his uncle, in which he speaks of himself as a kinsman of the Rev. John Fabian, who is also his best friend and counsellor, '*though not of his own communion.*' I remember the exact words, for the General showed me the letter not many months ago; those very words were underlined. Shortly afterwards both Mr. Fabian and Aubrey Seaton arrived on a visit here. Aubrey stayed but a short time, and left Seaton Hall abruptly. Mr. Fabian professed to be so much charmed with the place that he loitered here, and won the friendship of the General. And to a certain extent he gained my husband over to his views; but *he*, thank God! was never actually perverted, though he went a long way, as you know, in this specious Anglicanism. There was always a lingering suspicion, a latent doubt, in Mr. Clifford's mind even when he seemed most favourably inclined toward Fabian and his tenets. As for myself there has always been a decided, though unexpressed, antagonism between us. He knows that I always doubted him, even from the first; he knows, also, that at this moment I view him as an impostor and an arch deceiver."

"Perhaps he will refuse to act with you?"

"I wish he would. But he is too crafty for that; he must accept the trust under any terms. To reject the guardianship would be to renounce all hopes of Beatrice

and her possessions for his Church, to whose interests he is sworn a thousand times."

"Will not Mr. Fabian be greatly astonished when he knows the contents of the codicil?"

"Perhaps he will. But he is well aware of the distrust which arose in the General's mind some months ago. I think he would not have been so very much surprised if the new will had been executed, and himself entirely excluded. When he hears of the General's death his first thought will be, 'Has a fresh will been drawn up?' After the coolness that has of late subsisted between the Hall and the Tower, he will surely suspect something of the kind."

"Do not let us be troubled; even this may be overruled for good. Let us trust on, Emily, and feel sure that God will make it all right in His own time and in His own way. If we commit ourselves in this matter to Him, surely He will direct us, and lead us into a straight path."

"I wish I had your faith; I will try not to be so timid and distrusting, and, after all, the things one most dreads and most seeks to avoid are not often those which cause us the greatest affliction. I never remember a great trouble coming from the precise source which I had apprehended. As Mademoiselle Annette used to say, '*C'est toujours l'imprévu qui arrive.*'"

At that moment Viner entered the room, and announced "the Rev. John Fabian." Mr. Clifford had despatched an express messenger to the Tower, almost as soon as it was light, anxious that nothing should be neglected. Dr. Redmayne and Mr. Threlkeld were not expected till past noon, and they would explain all about the newly-executed document and its provisions. But a groom had ridden over at an early hour to Chalfonts, with a note from Mr. Clifford to Dr. Redmayne, so that he and the lawyer would probably expedite their movements. The Cliffords and Edith agreed to say nothing about the codicil till the arrival of those gentlemen, in whose hands all explanations should be left.

The ladies went together to the library, into which Mr. Fabian had been shown. There they found the co-guardian, looking so fearfully ill that Edith was startled, and, in spite of her intense dislike, moved to pity. He seemed,

too, to be in the deepest distress—a distress which had every appearance of being genuine. He could scarcely speak; tears choked his voice, and his hand trembled as he held it forth. When Mrs. Clifford pressed him to partake of the luncheon which was spread upon the table in readiness for those who might require refreshment, he shook his head in silence, and turned away from the goodly meats and generous wines which Mrs. Jelffe, who was far too good a housekeeper not to be equal to “the melancholy occasion,” had lavishly provided. Presently he sat down in the General’s arm-chair, and covered his face with his hands; Edith thought she perceived tears stealing between the long thin fingers. It was a painful and embarrassing position: great was the relief when Viner at last threw open the door, and announced “the Rev. Dr. Redmayne and Mr. Threlkeld.” Mr. Clifford, who had gone across the Park to meet these gentlemen, entered with them. Mr. Fabian exchanged a formal bow with the lawyer and the rector of Chalfonts. That the former came to disclose the existence of a new and recent will, which would entirely supersede the earlier document, so far as his own trusteeship and guardianship were concerned, he never doubted, and in his secret soul he was very far from disappointed; for Father Fabian was getting very weary of the endless strain put upon him; the man and the priest had long warred against each other, and the strife had reached that point when the one or the other must quickly and entirely succumb. It was the flesh fighting with the spirit, the earthly and the heavenly striving for the mastery, he told himself; but on which side the victory would be gained, he had no clear idea, though certain misgivings were perpetually disturbing him: the truth being, however, that the *man* was daily asserting himself more and more, and the *priest* almost imperceptibly finding himself in the minority. He had come to feel that his guardianship of the heiress of Seatondale might be a bitter pain, an abject slavery, a cruel humiliation and self-loathing. Yes! it would be a relief, though, of course, he would be severely censured for his extremely bad management, and he would suffer according to his supposed deserts; but, come what might, it would be a burden lifted



from his aching heart if it fell out that the trust once committed to him without reserve had passed into other hands. Dr. Redmayne's important air and his slightly bustling manner led Father Fabian to conjecture that it was he who would assume the reins of government.

The first quarter of an hour was spent in the common-places natural to such an occasion, and the clergyman and the lawyer, who, unlike Fabian, having had their appetites whetted by a long ride through the keen mountain air, showed themselves by no means averse to the excellent luncheon which good Mrs. Jelfie had provided, and until the needs of the inner man were fully satisfied, neither gentleman thought it incumbent on him to refer to the business which had brought him to Seatondale. Dr. Redmayne, however, felt it his duty to make professional allusion to the circumstances under which they met—to "improve the occasion," in fact, as became his cloth and calling. He looked lugubrious enough, and he really was saddened by the tidings which that morning had reached him, but the news of the poor General's death had not been any great shock, the end having only come a little earlier than was expected. He cut deeply into a fine game-pie which stood before him, saying, as he liberally helped himself—"Ah! in the midst of life we are in death! Boast not thyself of to-morrow!"

The excellent fare of which he partook, however, raised the doctor's spirits; and when he had done full justice to the game-pie, to the hung beef, and to the stewed pigeons—by no means neglecting a decanter of fine old port that stood at his elbow—he turned quite cheerfully to the lawyer, who had made his repast in perfect silence, with—"Now, then, Mr. Threlkeld, I think we are ready for business."

"All in good time," replied Mr. Threlkeld. "I eat more slowly than some people, being thereto advised by my medical attendant, on account of my predisposition to dyspepsia. Yes, Mrs. Clifford, I *will* take a small piece of that Stilton cheese—where it is ripest, please. The blue mould of a really ripe Stilton is a capital thing for the digestion. Splendid celery, certainly; but I am afraid of it. No, not a bit; I dare not run the risk; in half an hour

I should be in agonies. Another glass of port, I think, doctor? Thank you. This is wine worth drinking. Not a headache in a bottle of it, I dare say; but three glasses is my stint, and I very rarely exceed it."

At length Mr. Threlkeld's luncheon was finished; and, before Dr. Redmayne could speak, he thus addressed the company:—"I must protest against this being regarded as a formal meeting; the proper time to go into the late General Seaton's affairs will be immediately after the funeral. General Seaton's will—the only will he ever made, I believe, after his daughter's birth—will be forthcoming."

"The *only* will," said Fabian, with emphasis. "I have strong reasons for believing that the General made entirely new arrangements not long ago. There is probably somewhere—Miss Armstrong will know where—a will, bearing very recent date."

"Nothing of the kind," replied Dr. Redmayne quickly. "A new will was to have been drawn up and attested this very day. Mr. Threlkeld and myself are here by the appointment of our esteemed friend who has just paid the debt of nature. But there is a codicil ——"

"A codicil!" interposed Mr. Threlkeld, sharply. "I know nothing of any such document."

"Nevertheless there is such a document! I witnessed it myself the day before yesterday. I did not mention it to you, Threlkeld, thinking it would be better that we should hold as little private conversation as might be on the subject—which, viewed in some aspects, is not a pleasant one. I know where the codicil is, and if you will take the General's keys I will show you where it is at once. The sooner its provisions are made known the better. What do you say, Mr. Fabian? I happen to know that you are interested in all that takes place at this crisis."

"I see no reason why we should not at once make ourselves acquainted with the desires of our departed friend; the sooner we learn what they are, the more quickly and the more easily can they be carried out. A year ago I should myself have taken the initiative, knowing that I was sole master here during Beatrice Seaton's minority; but that some other person is appointed in my place I can-

not doubt. The codicil will surely settle the matter—the codicil, I dare say, makes null and void the will to which I have alluded. Whoever may be appointed the child's guardian, *it is not I*. I shall not be in the least disappointed if I find all previous legal arrangements, to which I was once a consenting party, *reversed*. Only I wish to know, as soon as possible, what really is my position in this house, or rather, I should say, whether I have any position in it at all."

Then Mrs. Clifford, with her plain common sense, came to the rescue. Her husband kept silence—*prudently*. Edith looked to her beseechingly: to speak out just then seemed scarcely her own part in the programme; and the representatives of law and divinity were evidently inclined to more shilly-shally and red-tapeism than was at all desirable. Very quietly she said, "I think, Mr. Fabian, I can tell you all you wish to know. We—that is, my husband and myself—spent yesterday, *en famille*, with the General; I believe we were asked with a view to explanations. Miss Armstrong, I need not say, made one of the party. The provisions of the codicil—if codicil it legally is—were fully detailed to us. The General told us that he had made arrangements for drawing up an entirely new will, *to-day*, and that he expected Dr. Redmayne and Mr. Threlkeld to assist him in the task. But in the mean time, lest he should not live to complete another legal testament—and he had strong presentiments of his approaching end—he signed and had witnessed a certain paper lying by him, which he thought, in case of need, might stand as a codicil. Taking into consideration that his heir was a girl, he thought he ought to provide for her female guardianship. He distinctly observed that there seemed no prospect of your own marriage; that he could scarcely, knowing how opposed you were to clerical marriages, anticipate the advent of a Mrs. Fabian, and that therefore he appointed two other persons as the personal guardians of his daughter, namely, Edith Armstrong and myself. Till she is of age, or till she marries, with consent of her guardians, Beatrice herself is our charge. The management of the estates, I think, will be yours. As far as the property is concerned I do not see that we,

Edith and I, can interfere with you. As far as Beatrice herself is concerned, I do not see that you can interfere with us. The custody of her person—is not that the legal phrase, Mr. Threlkeld?—is committed, without reservation, to Edith Armstrong and to Emily Clifford. Do you understand?”

“Do you mean that yourself, Miss Armstrong, and myself, are all associated in the trust?”

“That is exactly what I mean. Your guardianship is not removed, but ours is joined to it. I think you must feel that a woman-child is entitled to a woman’s care and protection. If you had been a married man, it would have been a totally different case; but—you will excuse me if I speak frankly?—a man who has never married, never known the tenderness of household ties—a man who lives, as you do, Mr. Fabian, a monkish sort of life, cannot possibly be the fit person to bring up, unaided, a girl who is to live in the world, and bear her part worthily as the sole representative of one of our most ancient families.”

“Quite right! quite right!” spoke up Mr. Redmayne. “Celibacy, under special circumstances, is doubtless to be esteemed; but a celibate is only half a man! He may be a whole saint, perhaps; but he is not a whole human being. God said in the beginning, ‘it is not good that man should be alone; I will make him an helpmeet for him.’ And the Lord God knew what was man’s best and highest estate, I trow! It is just this, Fabian—till man is a husband and a father the best part of his nature is not developed. He cannot understand what is patent to his married brethren; the commonest things in life wear one aspect to him and to them another. Anyhow, an unmarried man—a celibate in heart, and by choice, as you profess yourself—may be a very proper guardian for the youth of his own sex, but by no means the right person to undertake the bringing up of a motherless, kinless woman-child of rank and wealth.” And somewhat to the worthy doctor’s surprise, Mr. Fabian answered, “You are perfectly right. A motherly woman should have charge of a motherless child. The General showed his wonted judgment in securing for his daughter the protection and friendship of two such women as Mrs.

Clifford and Miss Armstrong. Such an arrangement I must perforce approve with all my heart. But is it absolutely necessary, Mr. Threlkeld, that I should be joined with these ladies in this important trust?"

"Not if you don't wish it," interposed Dr. Redmayne, eagerly. Mr. Threlkeld replied stiffly, "I cannot say, Mr. Fabian; I have never seen this famous document, which seems to turn things topsy-turvy and ignore all previous transactions. It may not after all be a legal document; it may be so much waste paper, worth nothing in a court of law. I would advise you to suspend judgment, to give no opinion, to come to no conclusion, until it has been professionally examined."

"Then the sooner it is examined the better," was Mr. Fabian's quick rejoinder. "If I seem hasty, I may surely be excused for wishing to know precisely how I stand in the present contingency. That I was prepared to find myself entirely superseded I do not hesitate to declare, but to find myself associated with these ladies surprises me extremely; nor can I at present entirely take in the position."

"We will have the codicil here at once," said Dr. Redmayne.

"I protest against an informal piece of paper being styled '*a codicil*,'" urged Mr. Threlkeld.

"Call it what you like," replied Dr. Redmayne, "only give us your opinion of its legality; that I know you will give conscientiously, old friend, in spite of your affection for red-tape, sealing-wax, and technical phraseology! There are the keys; will you take them from Mrs. Clifford?"

"I must decline," said the lawyer, coldly. "This is not the proper time. On the day of the funeral I shall be ready to act."

"But we cannot wait till then; Mrs. Clifford, will you bring the keys yourself? I will show you where the document was placed by my own hands, scarcely eight-and-forty hours ago. In case of the General's death, before the projected will was drawn up and attested, this codicil—that is what *he* meant it to be—was for immediate reference. I will take all responsibility."

They fetched the document, and then it was read aloud,

Mr. Threlkeld still protesting against the informality of the whole proceeding. But when handed over to him for examination, he was fain to confess that, informal though it was, it remained in all respects a perfectly legal and valid instrument, which it would be useless and impossible to dispute. It stood very much in place of the will itself, which it qualified rather than superseded. Mr. Threlkeld had nothing more to say, but he was not pleased at the course events had taken. The law, as well as the Church, was behind the times at that day in the remoter dales of the North.

Mr. Fabian, however, perfectly understood what the codicil meant, and why it had been framed, and what ends it was intended to answer. "It was to have been a mere stop-gap," he said, addressing Mrs. Clifford; "and to-day the real fence—the stone wall—which would have shut me out entirely and for ever, was to have been built up in all its solidity. Do not suppose that I fail to comprehend the situation."

"I am glad that you do thus comprehend it," she said, gently. "You see, then, that we cannot dispute each other's authority, only there is just this one clause to be considered: 'If the said John Fabian, clerk in holy orders, of Malham Tower, in the county of Wiltshire, refuse to act in conjunction with the said Emily Clifford, married woman, and Edith Armstrong, spinster, he is at liberty to decline his share of the trust at once and for ever, and the aforesaid Emily Clifford and Edith Armstrong are at liberty to choose whom they will, according to their own best and unbiassed judgment, to stand instead of John Fabian, clerk in holy orders, of Malham Tower.' Now it is for you to decide what you will do—whether you will consent to act with us as steward of the estates, or whether you will withdraw altogether, and leave us to choose some other gentleman as our coadjutor."

"Is there any one whom you would prefer?"

"Yes; the General, in our last conversation, spoke of his Grace the Duke of Aldinghame, and I feel sure his name would have occurred in the will which was to have been drawn up to-day. Should you retire, I shall feel bound to consult the Duke immediately."

"You wish me to retire, Mrs. Clifford?"

"I think as we have never agreed, Mr. Fabian, we are not likely to do so now. I am afraid there would never be harmony between us, and that would not be good for our little ward, you know. Quarrels between guardians are nearly as unedifying as disputes between parents."

"And you, Miss Armstrong? What is your feeling in this matter?"

"It seems to me that Mrs. Clifford is right. Your views and ours are so dissimilar, so antagonistic indeed, on the most serious subjects, that we should certainly clash on more points than one. Indeed, I doubt whether we should ever entirely agree; and for the child's sake her guardians ought to be of one mind."

"We might not differ so widely as you seem to expect. But, ladies, I cannot at this moment decide what I ought to do. Inclination bids me at once decline the trust; I am not sure, however, that I am free to consult my own inclination. At this present moment, I feel incapable of calm and grave reflection; I am stunned, I am wounded to the heart, I am ill at ease in body and in mind; I must, therefore, beg you to allow this question of my guardianship, in conjunction with your own, to remain *in statu quo* for at least a few days. What do you say, Mr. Threlkeld?"

"I say that you had better take time to weigh the matter over. No one can constrain you to an immediate decision. This document, which in courtesy we will call 'codicil,' entirely alters your position as regards the child herself, but not in any way as regards her property, over which these ladies cannot possibly exercise the smallest control. Think calmly what you will do, and let us know after the funeral; no one can reasonably wish you to assume or to decline the position upon the mere spur of the moment."

Which all present felt to be the truth. It was only just that Mr. Fabian should have leisure to consider the unexpected situation; neither could any one force him to make up his mind on the spot. There was nothing for it but to leave the matter for the present; all that was necessary to be done could be left to Mr. Threlkeld, who was sure to

do nothing rashly or informally. That gentleman, if exasperatingly slow, and given to red tape over much, was nevertheless a safe adviser, and worthy of confidence, as his late client knew positively.

Having come to this conclusion, Mr. Fabian begged to be excused, and returned forthwith to Malham Tower. As he crossed the Heath, however, he encountered Mr. Gerard Newcomb taking a solitary constitutional; he would have bowed and passed on, feeling thoroughly indisposed for conversation, especially with the usher, who, for the last few days, had assumed a dictatorial air and tone singularly at variance with his previous meek demeanour. But Mr. Newcomb had walked that way with intention; he knew why Mr. Fabian was summoned to the Hall, and he knew also—for he had pointedly asked the question—that there was great doubt as to the fact of the guardianship, which at one time had been a settled business, as those in head-quarters well knew. Fabian had said to him that very morning, "I am no more guardian than you are. The will which confided the heiress and her wealth to my care is burned long ago, you may depend upon it."

Now Newcomb, meeting his superior, addressed him, "Well, is all lost or won?"

"Something is lost, and something may be won," replied Fabian, wearily. "I had rather not talk about it at present."

"Permit me to remind you that delays are dangerous, perhaps fatal! This is not the time to let the grass grow under our feet, and I have my own orders, which must be obeyed. Those despatches must leave Malham ere to-morrow morning."

Thus urged, Fabian, knowing there was no alternative, related what had transpired to Mr. Newcomb, who seemed rather relieved to find that some coign of vantage-ground was still left. To have the heiress taken out of their hands was a blow; but it would have been far worse had Fabian's previsions been realised, and himself totally excluded.

"I have not made up my mind whether I shall act," said Fabian, at length, as the two paused in the cloisters.

"Excuse me," said the other, "but I do not think you



have any choice. You have somehow lost much that might so easily have been secured ; you cannot suppose the Church will be content, after so much waiting and expenditure, to let *all* slip out of her fingers—all for which she has striven, and for which so many sacrifices have been made. You will have to accept the post, though I grant it will not be a pleasant one, but beset with a thousand difficulties. Half a loaf, however, is better than no bread ; and a partial guardianship, though it does not include the personal custody of the heiress, is of far too much consequence to be rejected on any selfish grounds. Depend upon it, Father, *you will not be permitted to withdraw from the compact ! no, not an inch, nor for a single hour !*”

And Fabian sighed as one whose burden is too heavy, and upon whom the yoke presses sorely. He knew that his companion was simply stating facts—and, what was worse, facts of the stubbornest and sternest order.

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### “ARE WE IN THE RIGHT ?”

“There are swift hours in life—strong, rushing hours,  
That do the work of tempests in their might !  
They shake down things that stood as rocks and towers  
Unto the undoubting mind ; they pour in light  
Where it but startles—like a burst of day  
For which the uprooting of an oak makes way ;  
They sweep the colouring mist from off our sight ;  
They touch with fire thought’s graven page, the roll  
Stamped with past years—and lo ! it shrivels as a scroll !”

THEN Fabian took counsel with Mrs. Darcy. He implicitly trusted her judgment, and relied upon her fidelity towards himself ; she was the one person in all the world in whom he could so trust, for to no one else dare he speak unreservedly and out of his very heart, and no one else was ac-

quainted, as she was, with the true history of his six years' experience at Malham.

He came down to her sitting-room that night as soon as he felt secure from interruption. Gerard Newcomb, who remained all the evening with him, had retired to the cloister, and Fabian took good care to ascertain that the door leading into the cloister gallery was safely locked and bolted. He was beginning to dread the *soi-disant* usher almost as much as a hunted criminal dreads a detective, and the more so, because he did not know of the full extent of the power vested in the person of this man. He had never, it is true, usurped any authority in the household, though he had from time to time proposed alterations in the conduct of the school, and suggested one or two modifications in the ritual of the chapel, which, though ostensibly private, was always open to visitors. And these propositions and suggestions were invariably on the side of prudence; they were so wise, so palpably expedient, that Fabian could do nothing else but yield assent and consent simultaneously. But now Newcomb was taking a fresh tone; still respectful in word and look, he was beginning to act the Mentor in a way that terribly galled and fretted the harassed, heart-worn master of Malham Tower. Fabian felt that every sentence, every expression of his was duly recorded, and as for the "*despatches*," which regularly came and went between Malham, London, and Rome, Fabian saw no more of them than did his most inferior servants. Once on this score he remonstrated; indeed, he demanded sight of a certain document which he knew to be recently arrived, and the contents of which he thought he had a full right to know. But Gerard Newcomb, meekly folding his thin hands and lowering his eyes, replied gently, "Dear Father, I am greatly grieved that I cannot comply with your request; my instructions are to let the papers be seen by no one—by *no one*, without exception! They are addressed to myself, dear Father, and I may not, must not, let other eyes than mine behold them."

Then said Fabian, with a nervous tremor in his voice, "Which of us is master, Newcomb? Which of us bears rule here? Am I not your superior?"

To which the usher, still with downcast eyes and saddest gaze upon the pavement, answered, "Dear Father, no words of mine can express the reluctance with which I appear to set at nought your rightful authority. But the Church commands, and I, her humblest vassal, *must* obey. She, in her wisdom, chooses frequently to employ the most unworthy, sometimes the most despicable, instruments to work her will; it is in her service I am here, and if that service tries me sorely, if I, who yearn only to obey, am called to command, then I have no alternative, I must as cheerfully as may be *submit*! But lest you attribute to me a spirit of unseemly dictation, and a love of undue interference in that which concerns me not, I pray you read these few lines, with which I was furnished in case of an emergency like the present. You know, I think, the seal and superscription?"

Yes; Fabian knew them well, and as he read an unwelcome light broke in upon him. That which, till now, he had only suspected, became a certainty; he was, to all intents and purposes, superseded; that which was called in conclave "the Malham Mission" was chiefly entrusted to "our faithful servant Claude Gerard Newcomb," and Claude Gerard Newcomb it was who really and truly held the reins of power, though Fabian's feelings were so far spared that he was still permitted to flaunt the regalia of authority.

This little scene had occurred not many days before General Seaton's death, when it had become quite clear that Fabian had somehow blundered and fallen into disgrace with the magnate of Seatondale. After that Fabian felt very much like a wild animal caught in a trap, or rather like a creature so loosely tethered that he seems to wander at his own free will, while in reality he can go to the extent of his chain and not one inch beyond. He could go where he would, and do precisely as he chose, for choice of action to outward appearance was still his own. But some invisible power was always about him; some restraining influence was upon him; he was no more free than the prisoner on *parole* is free; and when this question of the guardianship arose, he had neither the liberty to decline nor to accept the trust; and under the yoke—which for

the first time in his life he felt—he writhed in helpless misery, knowing how vain it was to struggle or to repine. Then he began to comprehend how heavy and how painful the bonds of Rome might be. It is one thing to be the oppressor and another to be the oppressed. It is one thing to be the cunning strategist and another to be the victim of foul conspiracy. It was this sort of thing, with all its endless variations of thought and feeling, that Fabian was slowly and painfully learning to understand.

By degrees Fabian began to feel distrust of all about him. He was too familiar with the system of *espionage* not to dread it, when it was to be exercised no longer in his interests, but against them. For many a day he had been used to guard and fence his words, for years he had practised dissimulation, but now it was a case of Greek against Greek; the war was no longer carried on in the enemy's country: it had become internecine, and the very tactics which he had practised himself were now brought to bear against him and his failing fortunes. So, in his misery, he betook himself to the one friend whom he believed would not betray him, hoping to gain both comfort and counsel from this woman who was at once crafty and true, relentless and yet devoted to himself.

He found her knitting as usual, but she laid down her worsted and pins when he entered her apartment, and, looking in his face, perceived how greatly he had been tried since he left her in the morning at the summons of Mr. Clifford's messenger. Without a word she drew a chair to the fire, which was warm and glowing; she brought from a cupboard a small chest, from whence she took a cordial medicine, and proceeded to administer it; and then, and not till then, she asked quietly, "Now, what is it?"

"The old tale, the old tale, Athanasia!" he replied wearily; "I will tell you all about it."

As we know what Athanasia was told it is needless to repeat it. When Fabian ceased speaking, she sat looking steadily into the fire, as if pondering that which she had heard. At length she said, "Do I understand aright, must you either act *with* Mrs. Clifford and Miss Armstrong, or decline to act at all?"

"That is precisely my position! Had the General died

two days earlier, or had Dr. Redmayne paid his visit two days later, the old will would have stood unconditionally, and I should have been lord of Seatondale, and sole guardian of the child Beatrice. That will placed in my hands the fullest, the most irresponsible authority. With English law on my side, I might have defied my enemies, and I could have made of the little heiress just what I pleased."

"I am not so sure of that! But it does not matter, for the position is entirely altered. Tell me, Fabian, what is your own wish—would you, of your own free and unbiassed will, retire altogether from the business, or remain in association with the ladies, and execute justice as far as regards the Seatondale estates?"

"I would infinitely prefer to hold no office save that of private friend; for I am by no means certain that I can execute justice. I am no longer a free agent. No one knows that better than yourself, Athanasia."

"I do know it. How I hate that man, Gerard Newcomb! and, what is worse, I dread him as much as I hate him. How I detest his pretended humility and his veiled insolence, his assumed meekness and his covert malice! I could curse the day he set his foot on the threshold of Malham Tower."

"So could I. I have felt lately, Athanasia, as if I could rival Job in cursing the day on which I was born. But cursing is an useless expenditure of one's breath. If I cursed all my enemies continually, nothing would be gained; I am tired of idle words, tired of mere outward seeming, tired of vain pretences. I am so tired that I feel at last as if I could be content if only I might give up the conflict, and leave others to till the soil which I have found so stubborn and unfruitful. No, I will not be his child's guardian, if I can help it. And I can help it—one word, and those women, who hate and distrust me, as you and I hate and distrust Newcomb, will hold me discharged from all association with the Seatondale affairs. They are impatiently waiting for me to refuse to be their coadjutor, and who is to blame them? I have only to retire from the scene, and some one else will take my place."

"Some one who has not at heart the interests of our holy religion, I fear."

"The 'some one' would be a Protestant, doubtless. Probably, the Duke of Aldinghame, or perhaps Dr. Redmayne. Let the worst come to the worst, there is always the Lord Chancellor to fall back upon. Where there are no disputes, a ward in Chancery is in tolerably good case. One thing is settled positively. Beatrice will be brought up by Mrs. Clifford and Miss Armstrong; and as they are neither of them fools, and as they hold the Catholic religion in abhorrence, they will certainly make of her just what they will;—and their will?—well, we know pretty clearly what that is! The child will grow up a staunch Protestant, and she will be carefully educated in the principles of the Reformed faith."

"It seems to me, Fabian, that you are *not* free in this matter to act as you choose."

"Am I free in any instance? Am I free to do anything except rush to my own ruin and disgrace? Don't you see, Athanasia, that I am between Scylla and Charybdis, and they who are treading me down know it right well? If I refuse this co-guardianship on my responsibility, I am at once denounced as traitorous and contumacious, and punishment will follow; if, on the other hand, I accept a work which cannot be productive of success to our own party, and if I fail of securing the object to be at any price attained, I am equally ruined and disgraced. I wish I had never seen this luckless Malham. The whole place seemed ready moulded to one's hand when I first came here with Aubrey Seaton six years ago last April;—and now!"

"Now all seems lost; but take courage, and remember that it is a long lane which has no turning. The darkest hour is that which precedes the dawn. My advice to you is, hold on like grim death to that which you still can grasp. You are in England, and under English law, and your dealings are chiefly with English people; if it were otherwise, there would be right little chance for you. If you were in Italy, you would never again be seen outside the walls of a monastery. So long as you stay on British soil, you cannot, without the direst treachery, be crushed.

Only look well to yourself, and trust not *Damiano* : he is other than he seems."

"I have long thought so ; I am not sure that much of this trouble is not to be traced to his door. I will dismiss him ; that will be the safest plan."

"If you do, he will simply transfer his services openly to Gerard Newcomb, and you will gain nothing. Take my advice, and refrain from provoking *Damiano* ; be on your guard against him, let him know nothing of your purpose, whatever it may be ; but do not let him see that you distrust him. Attempt neither conciliation nor retaliation ; your only safety lies in a perfectly neutral course as regards this man. Hear all he has to say, and keep silence ; consult him occasionally if you like, but when he advises you to go to the right, go you to the left ; and if he counsels that you go forward, at once stand still, and, if possible, retrace your steps ! When is the General to be buried ?"

"On Christmas-eve. Before that day my mind must be made up."

"It will require no making-up, you will simply have to receive instructions. Fabian ! my advice to you at this moment is, accept the situation in which you find yourself ; offer no resistance, for it would be unavailing ; pulling against a complex knot only makes it the stronger. In quietness and confidence shall be your strength. We are only two—you and I ; but, with right on our side, we may yet win the day."

"Have we *indeed* right on our side ? Is God with us ?" And, as Fabian spoke, his face was blanched to the lips, and his voice sank into an unsteady whisper. Athanasia dropped her knitting, and gazed at him with alarm. "My poor boy," she said, tenderly stroking his hand, "they have worried and baited you, and lied against you, till you are half bewildered. Of course, we are in the right, we have done our best, and the whole seminary of Jesuits could not have done more ; the only fault with which I can charge you or myself is having placed Sister Augustine in too responsible a situation. She has craft, but not tact ; she cannot separate her own interests from those of religion ; *au reste*, she is of a sour, tart, waspish temperament, which does not improve with years. We made a

mistake in placing her with the heiress, I confess; she could not read the signs of the times, and she went too far and too fast, and in betraying herself betrayed us also. And who could have foreseen the course Mrs. Clifford took so suddenly? who could have anticipated the advent of a highly educated, wide-awake young woman like Miss Armstrong? We owe her a grudge, I think."

"By no means! She was guiltless as Beatrice herself of Mademoiselle's dismissal; she had no more to do with it than I on the other side of the Alps had. She wanted a situation, and the General required a superior governess for his daughter. Setting aside the difficulties which her presence has occasioned, and the fact of her being a very pronounced heretic, there is nothing to be said."

"And she has not the smallest sympathy with the Anglican movement?"

"Not the least! She recognises it for what it really is,—an attempt to bring back England and the English Church to their ancient fealty to our Holy Father, the Pope, to bring about by cunning strategy what can never in any other way be effected. But, Athanasia! it is of our own policy that I am doubtful. Are fraud and cunning the weapons wherewith we should fight our Church's battles? Are we not impostors—rank impostors? And is it not because our imposture has not perfectly succeeded that we are at this moment in so much difficulty? Would not a fair fight in an open field be, at least, a nobler and more honourable mode of warfare?"

"With that we have nothing to do; we are not responsible for sins committed at the bidding of our superiors, who, if we do wrong, will at once grant us full absolution. We are sworn to the Church, and the Church, as represented by those who bear rule in high places, has our salvation in charge. We have only to obey. Though at the same time observe, I do not think we ought to yield to the machinations of those who have conceived against us this monstrous spite, and who conspire our ruin."

"Will God absolve us if we break His commandments?"

"Fabian, you terrify me. Suppose any other person heard you speaking in this strain! God is to be obeyed *through* His Church, who alone interprets His command-



ments aright. You have no more liberty to dispute the decrees of Holy Church, or to question the policy of his Eminence, than a poor unlettered peasant has to cavil at the assertions of his priest, or a child to sit in judgment on his parent."

After all, Fabian gained very little comfort from Athanasia, though she did her best to console and to advise him. She loved Fabian dearly as if he had been her son, for in this strange woman the maternal element was strongly developed; and she hated Gerard Newcomb with a hatred as deadly as it was undeclared. In his presence she scrupulously refrained from the smallest show of devotion to Fabian, and she treated Gerard with courtesy, though with a certain coolness, which might well pass for natural manner in one long accustomed to convent life and rule.

When Fabian awoke next morning a strong desire possessed him to go alone to the Hall, and gaze once more upon the face of him who had been for so long as father, friend, and brother. After the morning service he slipped out into a little wood near at hand, instead of returning, as was his wont, to the Tower. He did not wish to be observed, for he felt sure that if he were seen taking the beaten path which led to Seaton Hall he would quickly be followed by Newcomb, and he longed with a vehement wild longing to escape the companionship, and even the presence, of this hateful man, who hung upon his words, he knew, only to betray him.

It was a dreary December morning, the air laden with sea-fog and mountain mist, and the herbage dank with moisture. Nevertheless, he pursued his way through the long withered grass and the rough, dripping undergrowth of the wood, rather than run the risk of undesirable attendance. It was a relief when at length he came out upon the open heath, and saw that he was alone, and, as far as he could see through the vaporous atmosphere, no one on his track. Then he quickened his pace, and was soon in the park, and within sight of the closed windows of the Hall. He entered the house by one of the old familiar ways which he had learned in those days when he was free to come and go as one of the family, and the first

person he met was Mrs. Jeliffe, with her arms full of black merino. "Dear me, Mr. Fabian!" she exclaimed, "what a turn you did give me! What with all the blinds down, and the shutters up in the best rooms, and all this black about, and poor, dear master lying dead upstairs, I'm as nervous as a cat! And you're looking like a ghost yourself, sir. Won't you sit down and take a glass of wine in my room, as you've often done before?"

"Thank you," replied Fabian, almost eagerly, feeling that he was succumbing to a strange internal sinking and a curious sense of weakness, which made him feel as if his legs were not quite at his own disposal. "Thank you, Mrs. Jeliffe, I could not take any breakfast this morning, and I slept ill, and the morning is so raw and cold. And then I am not myself. It deeply grieves me that my dear friend passed away without my bidding him a last farewell. If I had only guessed how near the end was!"

"We none of us guessed it, sir, though we knew it could not be far off. Still, it was very sudden at the last. But he was a good man, our honoured master, and he has entered into his rest. There, sit down by the fire, Mr. Fabian, and you shall have a toast and a good drink of mulled wine in five minutes."

The house was still as death; only the wind howled mournfully through the long passages while Fabian took his refreshment. When he had finished he said to Mrs. Jeliffe, "Can I go upstairs? You know what I mean? I must see him again; I must look on his face once more before the coffin-lid closes on it."

"I'll speak to Mr. Viner; I could not unlock that room door on my own responsibility, sir," replied the housekeeper, with a curious sort of hesitation; and she hastened away to Mr. Viner's pantry. Mr. Viner also was rather doubtful; but at last he said, "I don't see why he should not, if he wants to. They *were* friends, the poor master and he—there's no denying it; and I think poor master would not like us to say him 'nay.' He can't do any sort of harm; there are seals on all the places where any papers be, and the will and the codicil me and Mr. Redmayne witnessed on Tuesday is safe in Mr. Threlkeld's keeping. I don't see why he should not

go upstairs, if it would be any comfort to him. He seemed to take it to heart sadly yesterday."

"That he did, for he never touched bit or drop. Of course, he'll want to be alone?"

"Of course; and we could not set ourselves to watch him; besides, there's no reason. Let him have his wish, Mrs. Jeliffe; I'm sorry for him, that I am."

So Mrs. Jeliffe went back to the room where Fabian was sadly waiting, and, stepping on tiptoe, and speaking in a whisper, she bade him follow her, saying, "We'll go by the back stairs, please, sir, lest we should meet Miss Seaton; she's just got pretty quiet and composed, poor little dear, and the sight of you would be safe to set her off again."

Fabian gladly consented; he shrank from seeing the child, and from seeing Edith also. He only wanted to be alone for a brief space with all that remained of the friend who had trusted him, and whom he had from first to last shamefully deceived. Along the well-known corridor he followed Mrs. Jeliffe, till she took a key from her pocket and opened the door of the General's room. Another moment, and it was shut again, and he was alone with the dead.

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## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### ALONE WITH DEATH.

"I would have called, adjuring the dark cloud;  
To the most ancient heavens I would have said—  
'Speak to me! show me truth! through night aloud  
I would have cried to him, the newly dead,  
'Come back! and show me truth!' My spirit seemed  
Gasping for some free burst, its darkness teemed  
With such pent storms of thought!"

FOR awhile, Fabian stood motionless before the white-covered bed, whereon reposed the still, rigid figure, in all the marble immobility of death. The sheet was turned back, so that the face and hands were exposed to view.

How peaceful was that pale, quiet countenance! how perfect the tranquillity of the majestic features! how calm the brow shaded by the soft silvered hair! And then the thin, wrinkled hands, crossed on the unheaving breast, seemed to say that life, with all its busy tasks, its hopes, and griefs, and turmoils, was indeed over; the day, with its cares and its burdens, had passed away; quickly had sped the dim, shadowy twilight, and now the night had come, and all was ended.

Yes, *ended*! That brief space of threescore years and ten, which, compared with eternity, is like a single wave to the vast ocean, was really and truly ended; those closed eyes would open never more on earthly objects, those lips were mute for ever, those hands motionless for aye. It was *death* upon which Fabian gazed; and, though never was it less ghastly, less repulsive, the cold, the awful silence struck like an ice-bolt to his heart. So must *he* lie down some day; so must his hands cease from toil; so must he sleep that long, mysterious sleep, of whose awakening we know so little.

He was very weary of the life he lived, and had lived, these many years; he was tired and heart-sick, thinking of all his labour in vain. He was hopeless, too, of a better time to come; his sun had set, he told himself; his star had sunk below the horizon never more to reappear; he had eaten, and his soul was not satisfied, for the Dead Sea fruits of his own gathering were as dust and ashes to his lips. He was *so* weary that for a moment he envied the still repose of the newly-departed, lying there so peacefully, so perfectly at rest. But only for a moment, for Fabian knew well enough that death—as we mortals call the wonderful transition—is only *a change of worlds*! And he dreaded, he scarcely knew why, to approach that dark portal which leads into the unknown lands beyond the grave. The certainties of a lifetime had vanished; the comfortable content of years had flown like a morning dream; all on which he had depended, all in which he had trusted, all on which he had rested, had somehow crumbled into dust. He thought he was on the rock, and lo! the quicksands were swallowing him up! He had gloried in his strong tower, his fortress against which

neither earth nor hell might prevail, and behold it was only a refuge of lies ! its walls were sinking to decay, its timbers were rotten, and its foundations were insecure ! And an exceeding bitter cry came from his inmost heart as he fell upon his knees beside the bed ; for to him life and death were alike intolerable.

And as he gazed on the serene face he said to himself, " Oh ! that death were indeed the endless sleep that some have declared it to be ! If only one might lie down and slumber, earth turning to earth, and dust to dust, and spirit into mere nothingness ! If the play were but played out when the curtain falls ! If one could only be sure that this really is the *finale* of the story ! " But the inward voice that will not be bribed to silence when God's Spirit bids it speak, said, " Not so, oh man ! not so is the immortal essence quenched ; there is a life beyond the tomb. Wherefore, prepare to meet thy God ! "

" And have I not been preparing for death ever since I was a mere child ? " was Fabian's reply to the warning spirit-voice. " Have I not prayed, and fasted, and mortified the flesh ? Have I not faithfully obeyed the commands of the Church ? Have I not sacrificed myself—ay, and others also whom I longed to spare—to the requirements of that Church, who after all treats me as a renegade ? Have I not been an obedient child, a faithful servant, a patient worker ? Oh, God ! *Thou* knowest ! Is there aught I have not rendered up ? Have I spared my most precious things ? And yet I kneel here to-day a wretch, accursed, desolate, and burdened with a heavy weight of guilt ! "

And then, almost unconsciously, the miserable man began to recite the " Hours " in Latin, and as the thoughts which he could not repel still thronged upon him, he repeated, almost unconsciously, first a *Paternoster*, and then an *Ave Maria* :—" Hail, Mary, full of grace ; the Lord is with thee ; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death. Amen." And again and again he said the same words, vainly hoping that Mary, his lady and queen, would interpose for his relief, and yet all the while filled

with a secret distrust of the value of the appeal. He shuddered at his own unbelief: was not his want of faith in our Lady's intercession *blasphemy*? And what was the reward of that most deadly sin? Not the pains of purgatory, but *everlasting damnation*!

"And shall I *thus* lose my soul?" he asked himself, mournfully and almost despairingly. "Oh, Christ! speak to me. Oh, Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world, wilt *Thou* not have mercy upon me, a sinner? Wilt *Thou* not give me an answer of peace?"

And straightway came the answer! As a flash of light shows the wanderer in the dark that, after all his fears and tremors, he is on his homeward road, so a few words—familiar enough, but hitherto of small account—illuminated the midnight of that shrinking soul. The same voice that had warned him of the wrath to come, now whispered softly in his ear—"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life! I am the Resurrection and the Life! Come unto *Me*, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!"

*I will give you rest!*

As sweetest music fell those words on the world-worn, weary soul. *Rest!* That was what he needed! With rest would come peace, and calm, and, perhaps, renewal of strength. If only he might rest awhile, then would he be refreshed, and he could go on his way in patience, if not with joy. If only he might find some sure foundation—some Rock on which to build his hopes!—for that which for so many years had been his rock and refuge sank from beneath him, leaving him to breast as he could the raging of the waves.

How long he knelt there, he could not tell; but it seemed afterwards as if in that brief space of time—it could not have been much more than half an hour—he had lived a whole eventful lifetime. He rose calmed and comforted, and yet still tossed with many doubts; for though God had spoken to his soul, not yet was he released from the fetters and shackles which Rome imposes on her children. He clung to his Church with a fervour which few, perhaps, will understand. His was an intense nature; and all his powers, as well as all his affections, had been given to the

exacting mistress who now so ill repaid his long devotion. He might have said in poor Wolsey's strain, "Had I but served my God as I have served my Church, He would not at length have forsaken me!"

And again, looking at the quiet face, he burst forth, "Oh, my friend, my father! whom I deceived and betrayed, I repent me now that it is too late. Oh, that you could come back for one short hour to tell me what indeed is *Truth*. Is it—is it God's will that men should lie to each other that *His* cause may be advanced? Will He who is Truth and Righteousness countenance fraud and treachery? Is it the Almighty Father's pleasure that human ties should be broken, human affections sacrificed; that man should crush his fellow-man and put him to bitter grief and shame, ay, even do him to death—if occasion seem to warrant—for a question of *creed*? for a mere difference in belief; or, to put the best interpretation on it, for spiritual blindness? Oh, my friend, I have wronged you bitterly! You gave me all your confidence, all your trust; your noble mind could never suspect the base treachery which repaid your generous kindness! Yet, if spirits *may* come back once again to the scenes of earth—if only for a minute—come back now, and tell me *what is truth*! Tell me!—I have never before doubted it—whether, indeed, the voice of the Church *is* the expression of God's will!"

And intently he watched the cold fixed lips, almost expecting that the dead would speak or at least give some sign. But all was still; the white face was unchanged. On the silent lips death had set his awful seal. Between them hung the impenetrable veil; between them flowed the stream, the hither and thither banks of which wear such diverse aspects. Farther removed from him than the dwellers at the Antipodes was the man who had passed into the shadowy "silent land."

And time was speeding on, and the last farewells must be spoken, the last look must be taken, the last hand-clasp given; so once again, Fabian pressed the stiffened ice-cold fingers, and touched with his warm lips the marble brow, and gazed upon the settled mien, which he would see no more till the great uprising day. "Farewell," he said, in that low, tearless voice which tells of a strong

man's agony. "Farewell, my best and truest, my deeply injured friend! I know you will forgive me, if we ever meet again! Alas! will my God forgive me? Can I forgive myself? And here, I swear before my Maker, that come weal or come woe, I will do my best for the child you leave behind you. To her I will be faithful, even unto death; I will be her true and steadfast friend, so help me, God! And may *He* give me strength and wisdom fully, and as in His all-piercing sight, to discharge the trust which still remains to me."

For now he had made up his mind he would hold to the guardianship from which a few hours before he had shrunk with so many tremors and misgivings. He did not see his way clear before him—nay, he could not see his path at all; but in the name of the Lord he resolved to go forward, trusting to the guidance promised to all whose strength is in the eternal God. But never, nevermore, God helping him, would he do evil that good might come. Nevermore would he bow himself to the yoke of those who bade him, in the sacred service of religion, lie, cheat, betray, do unto others as he would not be done by. How he was to retain his fealty to his Church and yet disobey her commands, he could not guess—all was confusion, chaos even in his mind; but it was his settled determination henceforth to speak and act the truth in every instance, whatever it might cost—and it *might cost his life!* None knew that better than himself.

With one more sad glance he turned and left the room, anxious now to return home as soon as possible. Lost in thought, however, he took the usual way towards the grand staircase, and he had almost reached it when a door opened suddenly, and Edith Armstrong stood before him. She was turning away with a formal bow when suddenly his resolution was taken. "Will you grant me a few minutes, Miss Armstrong?" he said, in a voice which he hardly knew to be his own, so broken and hollow was it from the deep emotion of the last few hours.

Edith's first impulse was to excuse herself from any private interview; but raising her eyes to answer, she saw on what a death-like countenance she gazed. Then the tender pity of her womanhood awoke within her.



"Let this man be what he may," she thought, "he is suffering terribly, and why should I shun him? there is nothing to conceal; I have but to speak the simple truth and keep up my courage. Something bids me not turn away." So she calmly answered, "I am at your disposal, for at least a few minutes, Mr. Fabian."

And she led the way to her own sitting-room.

"You are ill?" were her first words, as he sank into a chair near the fire, and became, if that were possible, even paler than before. "Let me get you a glass of wine immediately."

"No, I thank you," he replied, still in that sepulchral tone which almost startled his own ears. "Mrs. Jeliffe gave me some hot wine, about an hour ago, when I came in. I am very cold, and tired, and very wretched, that is all. I was going home to try to sleep, but seeing you, it occurred to me to say just a word on the subject which so deeply concerns us both. Is it your settled wish that I withdraw from the trust which associates yourself, myself, and Mrs. Clifford, in the guardianship of this orphan child?"

And Edith answered firmly, though not unkindly, "Yes, Mr. Fabian, it is my settled wish. The association could not prosper."

"May I ask you to tell me why?"

"No! Do not ask me. I could only say that which would greatly pain and offend you."

"It is that you do not trust me?"

"I do not—I have not trusted you! Can you wonder? Can you dare to say in this house of death that I had not ample reason for such distrust?"

"You had more reason than you can possibly guess, Miss Armstrong. But that reason, whatever it was—and I may not be explicit—no longer exists. Believe me, when I declare to you, as in the presence of Almighty God, at whose bar of justice I must one day appear, that I stand pledged to Him, my God, and to my departed friend, to do my best and my utmost for the good of the child, and for the prosperity of her estates."

"But, Mr. Fabian, what you count good I and others may account evil! Especially would this be the case as

regards religion. As an earnest Catholic—I do not say *Anglo-Catholic*, for you are no minister of the Episcopal Church of England—you would desire to see Beatrice inclining to the tenets of the faith of Rome. I cannot blame you, for your Church tells you that all who are not gathered into her fold must perish everlastingly; the conversion, therefore, of those who are dearest to you must naturally be the one great desire and prayer of your inmost heart. If I believed that the communion to which I belong was the only one in which men and women might be certain of salvation, would I not strive night and day to win over, at any cost, to my own faith, all who came under my influence? And for those I dearly loved, would I hesitate to shed my heart's blood, if I knew—or thought I knew, which comes to the same thing, I suppose—that they might any day die accursed?"

"I think you would, and I am sure you would. But your Church—your Presbyterian Church—does not limit salvation to her own enclosures."

"Thank God, *no*! Oh! Mr. Fabian, trust me, there is no salvation in any Church. No Church in the world holds the keys of life and death; but Christ holds them. He is the door, He is the way; in Him is life eternal. There is *no other name* given, under heaven, whereby we may be saved."

"Do you believe that a Roman Catholic can be saved?"

"What is to hinder? I believe there many true saints in the communion of Rome; many who will there abide till God calls them to Himself. Their faith in Christ is overlaid with heaps of rubbish, and they are content to sit in the twilight, when they might rejoice in the noonday sunshine; but the faith *is* there, though feeble and imperfect, and the good Lord knows how it is with them, how they cannot throw off the bondage of a lifetime—how, as babes and sucklings, they have been taught to venerate their Church's authority, and to bow implicitly to her teachings. The Lord knows all, and He does not require the ten talents from those to whom five talents, or perhaps only one, has been committed. A man may have faith in Christ, and yet remain in that communion which does not

give full and unreserved honour to Christ as the only Saviour, the only Mediator."

"Nay! Christ is the only *Saviour* of the Roman Catholic."

"I cannot think so. It seems to me that Mary is supposed to have quite as much power as her Divine Son, and to be infinitely more merciful. If I were a Romanist, I should never pray to Christ, but always to Mary, because she is represented as being so much more loving, and placable, and sympathising. I am not sure that according to your breviaries and other authorised books, Mary is not also more powerful than Christ, for she seems to be able to compel Him to mercy when in His own person He turns a deaf ear to the suppliant."

"So many of the books to which you refer were written for the people, for the unlearned, for the masses, who need such—shall I say vulgar legends?—for their edification. You know there must be milk for babes, as well as meat for grown persons! Children need their picture books, and their fables, as men need their solid philosophy and sound literature. And some people are, in a mental and educational sense, babes and children all their lives."

"May not that be because the infantile nourishment of which you speak is unwholesome? If a child is fed on adulterated milk and dosed with 'cordials,' it will almost certainly be stunted in its growth, it will have but a sickly constitution, and its physical powers will not be properly developed. There is pure milk from the dairy, and there is chalk and water so treated as to resemble milk! Also, there is the pure milk of the Word, and there is the spurious spiritual milk of priestcraft or of the schools, which hurts the soul as much as the adulterated compound hurts the body—milk whereby neither the natural nor the spiritual child may grow."

"At any rate, Miss Armstrong, yours is not a mere inherited belief; you do not take propositions as facts until you have proved them. I must not, however, stay to discuss our divergent beliefs, for I have already remained here too long. Will you tell Mrs. Clifford what I have said to you, and will you try to trust me—a little—your-

self? Perhaps some day I may speak more plainly. I cannot at present; only be sure that now and from henceforth I am as true as steel. No more faithful, watchful guardian than myself can you find for the little Beatrice."

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### MR. VANCE'S DREAMS.

"The best of them is as a brier; the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge."—MICAH vii. 4.

JUST for a brief space we must leave Seatondale, and look once more on the long-deserted halls of Southerleigh. For years it had been a sad and solitary place, "kept up," as the neighbours said, inasmuch as nothing was permitted to fall into decay; but tenanted only by a few servants, and sometimes visited by strangers, to whom it was shown as one of the "lions" in that part of the country. "Old Vance," as people called him, was still in the Seaton service; he was the only person who knew exactly where—"far over the seas," as he used to say—a letter would find the absent master of Southerleigh. Father Eustace, kind and dull as ever, still carried on his ministrations as chaplain, and as priest of the little private chapel, in which the Romanists of the district worshipped; but his congregation did not increase; rather the reverse, in fact—some of the old people being dead, and some of the young ones having wandered away into other pastures, where flourished the flower of heresy.

One cold December morning he walked into Vance's sitting-room—for the old servitor and the good priest were the best of friends, and smoked many a pipe together and exchanged the news and the gossip, and talked over the glories of the past Seatons of Southerleigh, and wondered when the master and Miss Millicent would come home again.

It was earlier than usual when Father Eustace bustled in on that chill, wintry morning; as a rule, he strolled here and there, and in and out, in his own peculiarly lazy, aimless fashion, with a placid smile upon his lips, a dreamy expression in his rather dull, grey eyes, and very little to say for himself, except he were actually engaged in conversation with Mr. Vance. But now he came at full speed, muttering a sort of hurried "*pax vobiscum*," as he crossed the threshold, and calling lustily for Vance, who was not in his usual place, by the hearth in the oak-parlour.

A little housemaid, pail and broom in hand, responded to his call. "Jane! Jane!" he began excitedly, "where is Mr. Vance?"

"Mr. Vance, Father? He is in the old vinery talking to Matson. Shall I tell him your Reverence is here?" And the little maid bobbed a respectful curtsy to her well-beloved pastor, who was, indeed, the best friend she—poor orphan child—had ever known.

"Do, please, my child," replied the Father, taking snuff in a way that showed the working of some scarcely-suppressed emotion. "Do, Janie, my dear, and tell him I have important tidings to communicate—*very* important tidings—and I have hurried over to smoke a pipe with him. Run off, child, and there's a paper of bulls'-eyes for you"—which popular sweetmeat was a great favourite with the maiden, and likewise with Father Eustace, who was inordinately fond of anything made of sugar, and seldom without a good supply on hand.

Jane hurried off with her prize, and quickly found Vance, to whom she delivered her message. Vance smiled curiously when he heard of the "*very* important things!" and muttered to himself, "Ah! his Reverence thinks he's before me, does he? As if the master would not, in the first place, communicate with *me*! I'll hear what he has to say, and then I'll show the letter."

So saying, Mr. Vance hurried into the house and into the oak parlour, where he found Father Eustace standing on the hearth-rug, with his back to an enormous fire, and a folded newspaper in his hand. But the good Father's face rather puzzled him, for he wore the countenance of a man who deems it his duty to look lugubrious, as well as

important. And the news which Vance had received was altogether of a jubilant description. He looked grave, however, when he saw the priest glance with ominous solemnity at a certain paragraph in the day's journal which he held, and he could not summon courage to utter the words which had been on his lips as he entered the parlour; "for," as he said afterwards, "I saw by his Reverence's look and manners that *somebody* was dead or taken for death, and I did not know whether it might not be *them!* for letters from America take a long time a-coming, and newspapers gets their news by telegraphs."

"Mr. Vance," began the priest, "I have mournful news for you. I saw it in the *Downshire Chronicle*, not an hour ago, and I thought you ought to know as soon as possible, though I scarcely see how it can make any sort of difference to us *now*; once, you know, it would have been far otherwise."

The latter part of the speech reassured the ancient butler, though to what Father Eustace referred he could not at all imagine. But he likewise put on an important air, and hazarded the inquiry, "Family news, Father?"

"You have hit it," replied the priest. "Sad news from Seatondale."

"Why, then, I suppose General Seaton has departed this life? Heaven rest his soul, although he was a heretic!"

"Amen," fervently responded Father Eustace, "and yet— Ah, well, all that is in God's hands, and it does not become us worms of earth to pass judgment on our fellow-worms, even when they have the misfortune to be heretics. You know, Vance—though it is quite between ourselves—I hold that *some* heretics as well as *some* heathens will, *somehow*, by the mercy of God, and through the supererogatory merits of the saints, be saved from hell." To which charitable sentiment Vance paid little heed, being too full of the tidings just imparted.

"And so the old gentleman's gone!" he replied, thoughtfully. "Well, it's what we must all expect; we must all go in our turn. Mary be with us in the hour of our extremity, which may be nearer than we think for,

Father Eustace! And we are both old men, quite old men, your Reverence."

"Truly, my son," answered Father Eustace, with a mild, priestly manner. "And it behoves us to be prepared, since we know not when the Master will summon us. But, Vance,"—and he resumed his natural familiar tone—"I wonder Father Fabian did not write and tell us that there was danger."

"Well, your Reverence, I don't see that it mattered exactly. Seatondale is nothing to us now, the more's the pity. It's a shame that women should succeed to great estates; they are not fit for such responsibility, poor things. And to think that if that bit of a baby had never been born, Seatondale and Southerleigh would have been joined this blessed minute."

"Yes, she's lady of Seatondale now."

"How old will she be?—let's reckon. It was six years last April, wasn't it, since Master Aubrey set off to see his inheritance, and found all the folk rejoicing over the heiress that was to put the Popish heir's nose out of joint?"

"Six years—yes. The paragraph in the newspaper makes mention of her. The General was greatly respected in those parts, it would seem. Don't you think we ought to let Mr. Seaton know?"

"He'll know in a day or two."

"How is that possible? Is he not still in America?"

"No. He and Miss Millicent are on the road home. They are in England now, perhaps; for this letter has somehow been delayed. I ought to have had it a full week ago. Mr. Seaton writes by last steamer—which has had a bad passage, I suppose—to say as how he and Miss Millicent are coming home by the *next* steamer; and if that comes quick, they won't be long after the letter, I reckon."

"I wonder whether Mr. Aubrey—Mr. Seaton rather—will be back in time for the funeral. It would only be proper respect if he attended. I would go myself and represent him, only it is such a long journey, and the weather is bad, and it is so cold up in Fellshire, and my rheumatism won't let me travel."

"I wish Master Aubrey would marry, Father Eustace. He is almost nine-and-twenty; quite time he were wed."

"I greatly wonder he is not married. And there is Miss Millicent will be getting on the old-maids' list if she do not make her mind up pretty quickly. However, I am glad Mr. Seaton is not, so far as we know, bringing home a Yankee wife, though there are some very good Catholic families in the States, and in Canada, too, I believe."

"It is a thousand pities he could not fancy my Lady Euphrasia Beaufort. That would have been a fine match, only there was no money."

"Well, Vance! I am not a judge, of course, but I do not think Lady Euphrasia was the kind of woman to win a young man's affections. She was too dull and heavy—rather inanimate, in short, and not half handsome enough for the lady of Southerleigh. For my part I never thought it would be a match, though the girl was evidently willing enough, and the powers that be ready and eager to dance to the tune of 'Haste to the wedding.'"

"Ah! but there was somebody else! There was somebody up in that North country that the young master wanted, I know; but she turned out to be a heretic."

Father Eustace nodded his head. "Yes, yes, I know all about that. He has had plenty of time, though, to get over a mere boyish attachment, and now that he is coming back to his own I do hope he won't lose any more time, but bring home Mrs. Seaton before he is many months older."

"With all my heart, Father Eustace! This house requires a mistress, and here's to her good health, whoever she may be—for she's sure to be a good Catholic—in this glass of fine old port, that I decantered the first thing this morning, lest it should be wanted. Here's your glass, Father; you need not mind for once in a way, though it is rather too early for strong liquors, I must own."

"Well, for once in a way, as you observe, I will transgress my usual rule, which is to take nothing of the sort before my mid-day dinner; only think too, of the double news we had to-day."

"There'll be changes, Father Eustace, there'll be



changes! See if there won't! Something tells me we are going to waken up at Southerleigh, after our long quiet napping. And that reminds me, I have had such strange dreams lately."

Hearing which, the priest hastily buttoned up his long coat and looked for his stick, not caring to listen to the account of Mr. Vance's marvellous dreams, a theme on which he was apt to dilate most tediously, as all his particular friends but too well knew from sad experience. Father Eustace hurried away to keep an appointment that he suddenly remembered, and Vance was left to attend to his duties, which were as perplexing as they were unwonted. He had almost forgotten how a table should be laid, and the wine-cellar was in terrible confusion.

That day there was no arrival, and Mrs. Giblett and Vance both took heart, and proceeded to scold the under servants to the best of their ability. But next morning came a telegram:—"Dec. 21.—Liverpool, 9.30 a.m.—Just landed. Home this evening by late train. Exact hour uncertain."

"I don't like it," said Vance, as he showed the paper to Mrs. Giblett. "They ought to come properly in a carriage and pair by broad daylight, and there ought to have been a general muster to receive them. It does not become Seaton of Southerleigh to steal into his own house, under cover of night, like any common person. I'm right glad he's back again in his own country, and safe from perils of the sea, and I pray the blessed saints he and miss may not come to smash on those unblest railroads, that seem contrived for human injury and destruction; but my heart misgives me that misfortunes are on the road. I can't get over my dream, Mrs. Giblett! I was listening to Father Eustace preaching, and all of a sudden, as I looked at him, he turned into a living donkey, with a surplice on!"

"There's not much in that," replied Mrs. Giblett, who never troubled herself about dreams. "There's lots of donkeys that wear surplices, only they haven't long ears, and they don't exactly *bray*."

"Mrs. Giblett, I'm shocked at you, speaking with so little reverence of the clergy. But that wasn't all; I wish

it were, I do. Mrs. Giblett, in my dream I saw that grand altar-cloth, that is kept for high festivals—the last one we had new before Father Fabian left us, you know. Well, it shone beautiful; it looked like the wrought gold and the raiment of needlework that the Psalm tells of, and the precious stones in the border sparkled like real stars. And Father Eustace—only it wasn't exactly Father Eustace—was saying mass in a rough pilot coat and a son'-wester hat. And all of a sudden runs the young master up to the altar, and sweeps away the tabernacle and the candlesticks, and all the rest of the holy things, and looks and handles the fine cloth, and laughs out and says, 'It's all a cheat—all a cheat, I tell you!' And when I came to see, there was the gold all tarnished, like dirty old brass, and the broidery all frayed and moth-eaten, and the jewels—the sacred heirlooms that a faithful Seaton gave to the Church hundreds of years ago—all turned to common worthless pebbles! And I was so horrified that I awoke; and it bodes no good: I never dream of misfortunes but they come."

"Well," laughed Mrs. Giblett, "this one won't come; for I know that altar-cloth is quite safe, and looks as brand-new as the first time I ever set eyes upon it. I've taken care of that."

"May be—may be; but the dream *means something*—mark my words, Mrs. Giblett."

Late that night, and as quietly as if they were returning home after a week's absence, Aubrey and Millicent Seaton arrived in the carriage which had been sent to meet the train. Aubrey seemed in excellent health and in good spirits, though the news of his uncle's death, which had met him on first landing, had somewhat overshadowed the brightness of his spirit, as he set foot once more on English soil. Millicent had grown into a fine and rather stately woman, and it was easy to see that the brother and sister were all the world to each other. As she had never known General Seaton, the tidings of his decease affected her very little, if at all. Her first words, after a formal greeting to the assembled servants, were of an extremely prosaic character. "Mrs. Giblett, do let them hurry dinner, please! Mr. Seaton and I are absolutely starving; though

we had sawdust and dry tough ham at Rugby, and boiling tea and crumbly biscuit at Reading."

"I regret to say, ma'am, that dinner has been ready for serving this hour and more."

"That is not your fault, the train was behind time all the way. I think we will call the meal supper, for it is quite too late for dinner, only let us have it as quickly as possible. No, Melsom, I shall not dress; I have all I need in my travelling bag."

So, dismissing both maid and housekeeper, Miss Seaton made a hasty toilet, and was in the dining-room as quickly as Aubrey, who declared himself "savagely hungry." The young people enjoyed their repast—it was certainly too late to call it "dinner," for ten o'clock had struck some time. But when Vance would have placed the dessert and the wine upon the table, Aubrey motioned them away and turned to the fire, Millicent following his example. Poor old Vance! he was sadly disappointed, he had counted so much on his master's return, and he had long ago sketched out a programme of the ceremony to be observed. And now he and Miss Millicent came back just as if they had been on a friendly visit a fortnight, and there was no ceremony at all; and to crown the whole he was told that he would not be wanted any more that night, and that he could go to bed just as usual.

In fact, Aubrey and Millicent were anxious to be alone that they might talk over the tidings which had greeted them in a newspaper that had fallen into their hands at the hotel where they breakfasted. They had not been alone since the morning, save when driving from the station, and then they were too tired and hungry for conversation. And Aubrey had quite made up his mind to attend his uncle's funeral, and Millicent was more than half inclined to accompany him. They naturally wanted to talk things over. Left alone at last, Millicent began, "Well, Aubrey dear, if you go, I think I shall go with you, so make up your mind."

"I have done so; I decided at once. All things considered, I feel it my duty to be at Seaton Hall at this juncture. I wonder who is that poor baby's guardian? Not myself, I suppose."

"Certainly not, though no one in the world has so much claim. I have very little doubt that Fabian will have entire control over the person of the young heiress. That was the precise end for which he laboured and plotted, for which he sold his soul to the father of lies, I imagine."

"The General evidently died in the communion of his own Church; that is implied in the mention made of Mr. Clifford and Dr. Redmayne. But it will be easy to make the little heiress anything; if she and her goodly heritage be in the clutches of Rome nothing can save her or it. She is as surely Rome's prey as if she were already devoured a case of wolf and lamb, only the wolf, instead of being wolfish, will do his spiriting like Ariel."

"Aubrey, can we do nothing to save this child?"

"We will *try* what we can do, Millie! I will spare nothing, I assure you; only if Fabian be duly armed with plenary authority, legally confirmed, I am afraid there is not much that can be done."

"You have no longer any scruples about your vow of obedience?"

"None whatever. No vow made in childhood and under control can be binding, especially when that vow involves treachery, lying, and complicity in all sorts of guilt; but, thank God, I have at last shaken off that yoke. Would that I had been braver—that I had yielded to my convictions long ago. You see, Millie, I am—or at least appear to be—little less criminal than the Jesuit Fabian, for I not only consented to, but abetted the imposture. If General Seaton had lived, I must have confessed to him that his brother's son was a liar, a coward, an unmitigated scoundrel!"

"Hush, hush, dear! I cannot permit you so to vilify your own character. Remember how you were brought up—how you were trained to deceit, even as an acrobat's child is trained to tumbling. God will not hold you responsible."

"I trust not; for *He* knows how firm was my trust in Father Fabian, how implicit my faith in all that Rome decreed, how I was a mere tool in skilful hands that never yet spared their instruments. I knew only the creed which I had been taught; I thought I served my Maker by blindly surrendering my own will and my conscience, even my code

of honour, to those whom I held to be inspired with infallible and heavenly wisdom. I declare to you, Millicent, that I never once doubted even for a second the righteousness of my position, nor the truth of those false doctrines which were so sedulously implanted, till that day at Chalfonts, when Father Fabian disclosed his plans, and bade me present him as an Anglican clergyman to my unsuspecting uncle. From that hour my love for Fabian diminished; and, in that hour, even as I wrote the pitiful, lying words, which yet were capable of two diverse interpretations, my esteem and reverence for him perished as a thing suddenly slain, and I ceased to respect myself. Thankfully I would have confessed my own shame; but there was my *vow*—my solemn oath of obedience to my spiritual director! I do not wonder that Edith Armstrong so firmly refused me: a noble nature like hers could never have been linked with one steeped in all the fraud and treachery of a system which teaches that a Christian man may—and even *must*, if commanded—do evil that good may come! I dare say Edith has long ago married.”

“I am not so sure about it. I don’t know why, Aubrey, but I have a presentiment—a prevision, or what you will—that she is still unwedded; and that the love for you, which she frankly confessed, still holds, and will hold to her life’s end.”

“If so, why did she never answer our letters?”

“Perhaps she never had them, or perhaps we never had hers. However, I am determined to find out. When we go north, I shall certainly visit Lunechester, and call on your redoubtable Mrs. Jevons.”

“You will, then, accompany me to Seatondale?”

“Surely! We have not travelled so many thousands of miles together to separate now for the sake of so short a journey. Shall we start to-morrow?”

“We will certainly get to London to-morrow; and, Millie, I think we will go straight Chalfonts, and take up our quarters at that comfortable inn I told you of. I hope Mrs. Drewitt is still alive and flourishing. There we shall hear all the news, and learn on what day the funeral takes place; and we can go on to Seatondale sooner or later, as seems expedient.”

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

## CHALFONTS REVISITED.

"Again at Christmas did we weave;  
The holly round the Christmas hearth;  
The silent snow possessed the earth—  
And calmly fell our Christmas-eve.

"The yule-log sparkled keen with frost,  
No wing of wind the region swept,  
But over all things brooding slept  
The quiet sense of something lost."

On the 23rd of December Mrs. Drewitt, of the "Thurston Arms," was as busy as she well could be; so busy, so perplexed, so frequently appealed to, and called hither and thither, and so "tried" by the blunders and carelessness of her domestics, that her husband declared confidentially to his old friend, the postmaster, "Be whipt if I don't think Betsy's *cross*! and she haven't been that these twenty years; not since her big cask of elderberry wine burst in the far-cellar, because it was bunged up too tight before it had done working. I think I'll go across to the Holt Farm about that there heifer, and be out of the way till the air is clearer."

Which he did accordingly, greatly to the chagrin of his better-half, who wanted him for half a dozen jobs.

"Just like the men," she said to Miss Jessie Redmayne, who looked in with her favourite curate, to deliver a message from the rector; "just like 'em, Miss Jessie, never no good when there's extra work about. Always in your way when you'd rather have their room than their company, and always out of the way when they're wanted to do a hand's turn in the house. They are crabbed enough if there's aught neglected; but there must never be a bit of fuss and upsetting! I suppose they think we women [do our business by magic! I wish Sam would take my place for a week or two, he'd soon find out the women-folk have more to keep 'em a-going than he

thinks for. And how is Miss Annie, if I may ask? I beg pardon, I mean Mrs. Elliot; but how is the baby?"

"They are quite well, thank you, Mrs. Drewitt; and Annie and her husband come to-morrow—for the funeral, of course. What is it makes you so dreadfully busy to-day?"

"Can you ask, Miss Jessie? The funeral *and* Christmas coming together! There's the Christmas dinner and the supper, as usual; and all to-morrow, that I ought to have clear for preparation—boiling the puddings, and stuffing the turkey, and soaking the ham, and getting the made-gravies ready—the house will be as full as it can hold. You see, all the country-side is come up, to pay the last respects to the poor dear General, and the days are so short, and the nights so mirk, that lots of folk mean staying till next morning, and one or two, that are going south, will stop on over Christmas-day. How to find beds for them all was a rare puzzle, but I think I've settled it now; Sam and me must give up our room for to-night, and perhaps for to-morrow night; we can manage with a mattress in our own sitting-room, and Mrs. Crake will give the maids a bed, if need be; so I think we shall do. I should not like it to be said that the 'Thurston Arms' turned customers away at such a time, and did not do its duty."

"Here is somebody coming in hot-haste," said the curate, as the clatter of a horse's hoofs was heard not far off; "why, it's a telegram!"

"*Never!*" cried Mrs. Drewitt, rushing out in dismay. A telegram, to her, meant something dreadful—a sudden calamity, an unexpected trouble! A man known as "cracked Billy"—because he had once broken his head, and undergone an operation—now rode up, flourishing a coloured envelope in his hand. "Here, missis!" he said, as he gave the missive into the landlady's outstretched hand; "this ere comed last night, when it wur a'most this morning. And station-master, he said I'd better ride ower-sands first thing when it wur daylight, and bring it on to ye; 'cos,' says he, 'it's maist likely summat as Mrs. Drewitt did ought to know.'"

"It is generally understood that the telegrams *are* urgent,

Billy," replied the mild curate. "I am afraid you waited for a good deal of daylight, for it is now past noon; and an hour and a half on that fast nag ought to have brought you here, all safe and sound."

"I wou'not tell ye a lie," returned Billy, sturdily; "it clean went out of my 'ead, til I see 10.20 slow train come up, and then I saddles Gip all of a hurry and comes full gallop ower-fells, for I couldna' come ower-sands then—for why? 'cos tide had gotten up and channel wur fathoms deep, and I ain't a fish, and Gip ain't a sea-oss, and me and Gip wants summit down our throats, for we've rode hard, we have. No bad news, I hopes, missis?" For Mrs. Drewitt was turning, as Jessie afterwards averred, all the colours of the rainbow.

"It's neither bad nor good; but it's aggravating, and that's what it is! Read that, Miss Jessie!"

Jessie Redmayne read: "Mr. and Miss Seaton require rooms at the 'Thurston Arms.' Will arrive to-morrow by afternoon train, stopping at Farleton. Send carriage. Dinner to be ready at 6.30. Beds and rooms to be well aired."

"There! now what's to be done! I wouldn't have had it happen, Miss Jessie, for a hundred pounds! Beds and rooms well aired! They are aired enough; I never had a damp bed in my house, nor my mother before me; and every room in the house has got a big roaring fire in it, this very moment. But, bless you, they're all *engaged*. I might dine them perhaps, but sleep them *I can't*! They could not have one room, leave alone two! And they of all people! Why don't they go to Seaton Hall!"

"But who are they?" inquired Jessie, turning over the telegram, as if to look for further information. "Yes. I see, 'Aubrey Seaton!' but he cannot be the young man that we used to call the Popish heir?"

"Indeed, Miss Jessie, it can be no other; and he spoke to me several times about his sister. As nice a young man, and as true a gentleman, as ever stepped, though he was a Papist, through being brought up to know no better. I never in all my life took to a young man as I took to him; I felt as if I could never do enough to make him comfortable. I've often and often wondered what had



become of him, and wished he'd come this way again ; and now,—when he do come ! to think I haven't a bed to spare, nor a chimney-corner vacant ! Ah ! it is aggravating ! I've a great mind to make some one turn out."

"Of course Mr. and Miss Seaton are coming to the funeral ?" remarked the curate.

"Of course they are ! They must be next of kin, after the little lady, and her very nearest relations. Only, being such, why don't they go right on to Seatondale ? Being of the family, they should not be at an inn at such a time."

"It does seem strange," said Jessie, meditatively. "I am beginning to recollect about Aubrey Seaton, now ; I did not see him, I was at school in Edinburgh when Beatrice was born. Mrs. Drewitt, I think I will go straight home and tell papa ; perhaps he will settle what is to be done."

"I wish you would, Miss Jessie ! I'll take it very kind of you. I was thinking of going over to Mrs. Musgrave, but I can't well spare the time. Perhaps the doctor may think how it can be managed, though really I don't see how I am to make up another bed in this house to-night."

"Perhaps a bed or beds in another house might do," said Jessie, wrapping her plaid round her, and preparing to start. "I'll let you know in half an hour, Mrs. Drewitt, if papa and mamma can suggest anything. May I have the telegram ?"

"I don't see what they can suggest, but taking them in themselves," said Mrs. Drewitt to herself, as she watched Jessie and her youthful curate down the street. "I'm right glad Miss Jessie and that sprig of a priest looked in just when they did. If Miss Jessie Redmayne takes a thing in hand, it's as good as done ; Miss Clara's the one for beauty, but Miss Jessie's the one for sense. How can she let those hobble-de-hoy curates come dangling after her ? The whole lot of them put together would not make a man worthy of her. Well, I must set to work again, and make up for lost time, though somehow I don't feel so driven as I did an hour ago ; but I'll speak my mind to Sam when he comes in, that I will. What's the good of a husband if one can't row him a bit, once in a while ? Hus-

hands are aggravating, even the best of 'em ! Still, I wouldn't be an old maid for anything ; and I wouldn't have any other man in the world than my Sam ; no, not if he were a prince all over gold and diamonds ! ”

After which brief expression of opinion, Mrs. Drewitt went back to the fireside, and chopped suet and crumbled bread and beat eggs, giving a keen eye to the maids from time to time. She was looking for something in her well-filled spice-box, when a shadow darkened the doorway, and, looking up, she beheld Dr. Redmayne entering the kitchen.

“ I am come to put you out of your misery, Mrs. Drewitt,” he said, cheerfully. “ There need be no difficulty. Let them come to the Rectory ; Mrs. Redmayne is giving her orders at this minute. We have two spare rooms, and two more at the dinner-table will be heartily welcome.”

“ I did think of such a thing, doctor ; only I knew Miss Annie, that was, and her husband, would be coming for the Yule-tide.”

“ Oh, the girls must give up their room to the young married folk ; they will do very well in the old nursery.”

“ I am sure it's very kind of you and Mrs. Redmayne. But, doctor, I am dying to know why Mr. Aubrey and his sister are not to go to the Hall.”

“ I hope you will not die, Mrs. Drewitt ; but really I know no more than you do. I was not even aware till I had the telegram that the Southerleigh Seaton were in England. They have been wandering about the face of the globe for the last five years. General Seaton thought his nephew slighted him, and he was very much annoyed ; for they seemed to take to each other when young Aubrey paid that visit after Mrs. Seaton's death. I confess I cannot make the young fellow out. After behaving quite dutifully to his uncle and winning his favour, off he steals, and never once comes back again ; and, what is worse, never answers the General's letters when he writes to him ! I believe the General wrote three several times, and not a word did he receive in reply. It was uncourteous, to say the least of it.”

“ Mr. Aubrey seemed anything but that ! Perhaps he was ordered not to write. Those Roman Catholics are

bound hand and foot, I am told, and can do nothing but what their clergy sanction. I can't fancy that young man being rude or unkind. When he found out the inheritance of Seatondale was gone from him, he took it as meek as a lamb. No Protestant could have behaved better."

"And a great many Protestants would have behaved worse, I am afraid. Dear me, I quite forgot that he was a Roman Catholic! What will the world say to the Rector of Chalfonts entertaining two professed Romanists?"

"They will say, doctor, what is always true of you and Mrs. Redmayne, that you were ready to entertain strangers! Given to hospitality! And being who they are, and the occasion being what it is, no one with any sense or any charity could possibly lay blame to you; and as for the senseless, uncharitable folk, they may as well prate about one thing as another; they harm themselves far more than their neighbours, for an evil tongue always meets with its recompense, sooner or later."

"I congratulate you on your good sound sense and charitable disposition, Mrs. Drewitt. Well, then, that is settled, and as I know you are extraordinarily busy, I will not keep you from your duties."

"Thank you, doctor; I wish everybody was as thoughtful! But there's just one thing more; shall they go straight to the Rectory, or come here first?"

"I shall send my own carriage to Farleton Station to meet their train. You need not trouble yourself in the least, Mrs. Drewitt. Good day."

Accordingly, when in the dusk of the December afternoon, Aubrey and Millicent stepped on to the platform of the little fell-side station, they were not slightly surprised to be accosted by a brisk-looking, dark-eyed young lady, muffled in cloak and furs, with—

"Mr. and Miss Seaton, I presume?"

It was Jessie Redmayne, who had come in her father's carriage to meet and welcome the strangers, and she quickly explained why she was there. "Papa would have come himself," said Jessie, "but he has many things to attend to, and there is the funeral to-morrow. Is this all your luggage? Oh, we can take it easily if you don't mind being a little crowded. The carriage is ready, and

I had the foot-warmers refilled while we waited for your train. It is real winter weather, is it not ? ”

And almost before they knew what had happened, the Seaton found themselves packed snugly, with plenty of wraps, into the doctor's comfortable close carriage. As Millicent said, it was the most charming surprise they had ever had ! Not expecting to see a friendly face except Mrs. Drewitt's, it came like a glow of sunshine on the snow, to be welcomed, and cared for, and made one of the Rectory family so cordially and without ceremony. They had heard at Keirmonth that the funeral was to take place next day, and, of course, Aubrey was well aware that the General would be laid beside his wife in the vault of the grand old Priory Church.

Dr. Redmayne and Aubrey had met before, more than once, on the occasion of the latter's sojourn in Fellshire ; but the reverend gentleman declared that without an introduction he should scarcely have believed the young man to be the same. The Aubrey of six, nay, six and a half years ago, was little more than a boy, and his countenance wore the aspect of one still in youthful trammels. It was a very pleasant face that Dr. Redmayne recalled, but still a boyish face ; and he almost started with surprise when, in the full light of his own hall lamp, he gave a hearty welcome to his guest. For this Aubrey was a man indeed, with strength of purpose, and vigour of intellect, and fervour of spirit written on every lineament. The doctor was charmed, and rejoiced at the happy chance which had brought his visitors to the Rectory. And while they were preparing for dinner, he found opportunity to say to his wife—“ Flora, my dear, I don't know when I have seen a young fellow I have taken to so much at first sight. He does not look so very young though, and, now I come to think of it, he cannot be far off thirty. That is a man to hold his own, and to leave his mark on the history of his day and generation. He knows a thing or two, and will form his own unbiassed judgment. He will be no priest-ridden victim, as they say his father was. How I wish we could convert him to a good, sound, orthodox Protestantism ! ”

Aubrey and Millicent passed a very pleasant evening.

The Misses Redmayne and Miss Seaton became excellent friends, and found plenty to talk about. Millicent was pleased to hear of her uncle and her little cousin, and she asked many questions which the Redmayne girls, who had seldom visited Seatondale of late years, were unable to answer. Also there was the difficulty of the two conflicting faiths, and once or twice, in speaking of merest incidents, both Clara and Jessie felt themselves liable to be tossed on the horns of a wicked dilemma. It was not easy to reply to all Millicent's queries without some reference to religious matters, especially as Mr. Fabian's name could not well be kept out of the conversation.

"Mr. Fabian, I believe, professes himself of the Anglican faith?" observed Miss Seaton, after something had been said about the guardianship of the heiress.

"He does, Miss Seaton," replied Mrs. Redmayne. "He still, like many others of his clique, remains in the communion of our Church. But I do not hesitate to say his place is with you, and not with us."

"With me?" asked Millicent, smiling.

"Why, yes, my dear young lady; he is undoubtedly a Roman Catholic at heart. I have thought so a long time, and man's proper place is among his own people. I should have some respect for Mr. Fabian, who is undoubtedly a man of marvellous gifts and deep learning, if he would nail his own colours, and not ours, to the mast."

"But, Mrs. Redmayne, I am a Protestant."

"You don't say so! Oh, my dear Miss Seaton, what a blessing! How delighted my good husband will be! And if our dear friend, the General, had but known!"

"Perhaps he does know now," said Millicent, thoughtfully. "Perhaps the dead—or they we call the dead—watch 'with larger, other eyes than ours;' who can tell?"

"Ah, who can tell?" sighed Mrs. Redmayne. "But, my dear, you cannot imagine how pleased I am! How did it all come about?"

"My 'version, as the *Guardian* would say? I cannot tell you, for I scarcely know myself. No one talked to me, and I read no controversial books. I only read my Bible and the 'Pilgrim's Progress;' and I think God's

Spirit was with me, and opened my eyes, and led me into the paths of simple truth. That is all."

And that was all that Millicent would have told any one, excepting her brother. She had a sensitive shrinking from narrating her religious experiences. Her own inner life, her inmost heart, was too sacred to be laid open to human inspection. "I am not ashamed of my conversion," she used to say to Aubrey; "but I deprecate above all things being quoted as 'an interesting case.'"

Meanwhile, Dr. Redmayne, left alone with his guest in the dining-room, was learning with intense surprise that which was yet unknown, though it had been slightly rumoured at Southerleigh, and that which when published would be called "the apostacy of the young Seaton from the ancient faith of their ancestors."

"Do I understand you aright, Mr. Seaton?" asked the doctor, scarcely daring to trust his own ears. "Are you in very deed and truth a *Protestant*?"

"In very deed and very truth! And I am a stronger Protestant than hundreds brought up within the pale of your own Church."

"No doubt, because you would feel your way at every step of the road, and you would take nothing for granted. Also, there has set in, I am sorry to say—but it is of no use ignoring the fact—a steady reaction Romewards in our English Church. I wish—I do wish I had known this earlier!"

"And wherefore, Dr. Redmayne?"

"On your little cousin's behalf. But I forget you know nothing about your own family affairs. Fabian—who I am convinced is a *Jesuit*! and I am not one to see ghosts in broad daylight, mind you!—Fabian is left that child's guardian. And but for me he would have been sole guardian. Think of that!"

And then the doctor told Aubrey all that the reader of these pages knows so well, but with which the young man was totally unacquainted. He listened, of course, with the deepest interest. "If only the General had known that you had abjured the errors of Popery," said the doctor, lifting up his hands; "if only he had known two

short weeks ago, all this trouble about Fabian might have been avoided. I wonder now if he will act with Mrs. Clifford and Miss Armstrong. The ladies devoutly hope—*not*! If he decline, it is their privilege to choose some other gentleman in his place, for the child *must* have one male guardian, who, however, will not have the custody of her person. Who would have so great a right as yourself? Who could be better fitted for the post than the child's own Protestant kinsman!"

"You mentioned the names of two ladies?" interrupted Aubrey. "Mrs. Clifford I remember very well; who did you say was the other?"

"Miss Armstrong—Edith Armstrong. She came as Beatrice's governess and friend, after the dismissal of that precious humbug of a Mademoiselle Annette, who tried to poison them all. But she is no common person, and the General, who had his wits about him to the last, soon found that out; in fact, he made a sort of eldest daughter of her, and I believe the poor girl feels as if she had just lost a father, and she has promised never to leave Beatrice while she needs her protection."

"Was she ever at Lunechester?"

"Surely she was. It was there Mrs. Clifford first met her, and it was there the acquaintance ripened into an intimacy such as seldom subsists between an unmarried and a married lady. Mrs. Clifford answered for her when she brought her to Seatondale. Do you know her at all?"

"I once met a Miss Armstrong at Lunechester, and she was a governess."

"Depend upon it she is the same then. She is simply the most beautiful woman I ever saw! Was your Miss Armstrong handsome?"

"Extremely so; though that is scarcely the word I should use in reference to her looks. She was something more than handsome."

"Ah, well, you will see her to-morrow at the funeral. She and Mrs. Clifford mean to follow. My dear Mr. Seaton, words cannot express my satisfaction at finding you a true, staunch Protestant!"

That night, or rather early in the morning of Christmas-

eve, Aubrey looked forth once more on the glorious Priory Church and the shadowy fells, dimly seen in their snowy covering under the brilliant northern starlight; and once more he soliloquised—" *What will Father Fabian say?* "

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## CHAPTER XL.

## THE FUNERAL.

" Our little systems have their day;  
They have their day and cease to be;  
They are but broken lights of Thee,  
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they."

COLD and grey rose the day of the General's burial. The air was pretty clear, and the winds low, but the sun shone only in cold, pale, fitful gleams, and the fells, dark and hazy in the distance, rose like spectral shadows against the hueless sky. Much snow had fallen during the night, and the great fear was lest the funeral procession should be impeded on its upland mountain road. The Chalfonts bells rang out their saddest muffled peal; blinds were down and shutters closed in the one street of the quiet little town, and the "Thurston Arms" was crowded, not with revellers, but with mourners from far and near, waiting to join the solemn *cortège* as soon as it appeared at a certain spot, about half a furlong from the inn. It was expected about two o'clock, but ere that hour nearly all the respectable inhabitants of Chalfonts were assembled in the Priory Church, Mr. and Mrs. Drewitt among them.

Aubrey and Dr. Redmayne walked together to the vestry, the old chapter-house of the ancient institution. After they had warmed themselves at the glowing fire which burned there, they strolled into the church, where all necessary preparations had been made. In the distance moved about the bent form of Mr. Crake, attending to



the stoves, which seemed to be already at a white heat. The pale snowlight fell with pallid gleam through the many coloured windows ; every now and then the organist, in his hidden eyrie, struck a few tremulous deep notes, that sounded like the low refrain of a *Miserere*, and far above them boomed the melancholy bells, that were never rung in such wise, save on special occasions. Only for the Royal Family, the rector's family, and the magnates of the county was that requiem-like peal permitted. But Aubrey remembered that so it had murmured, sad and dirge-like, over hill and dale and sea, when he and Father Fabian had followed gentle Mary Seaton to her last resting-place. How long ago it seemed ! How much had happened since then ! how all things were changed ! and above all, how strangely were altered his own relations with the man who had once been the guiding-star and the ruling spirit of his life. Something more than land and ocean had severed them ; there was a feud between them which ancient kindness could not heal. How were they to meet, now that at last the time so long foreseen, so long apprehended, had arrived ?

And Edith, the lovely romance of his youth—for Aubrey was no youth now, but every inch a man, in mind and soul, full statured—could it be that he was once more to see the face so long remembered, so often recalled during those far west wanderings across the sea ? No differences of creed divided them now, no compromise of faith was needed ; they knelt at the same altar, and drank of the same cup of life, and ate the same bread of blessing. Would they be friends again, or more than friends ? Aubrey had asked himself that question many times since the preceding evening, when he had first learned that the lady of his love was still unwedded, and only separated from him by a few miles of rugged mountain road.

"This is a magnificent old church," said Dr. Redmayne, as he and Seaton stood together between the chancel and the choir. "It is finer by far than some cathedrals. There is—or rather there was—some talk of making it into a regular Minster, the centre of a new bishopric. Will it ever come to pass, I wonder ?"

"I should think not," replied Aubrey, "unless the

whole face of the country were changed. This place is out of the world, and there is really no population to speak of, and it seems to me there are already more cathedrals and more bishops, so-called, than the Church of England knows what to do with."

"Permit me to ask why you use the phrase 'so-called,' in speaking of the prelates of the National and Established Church?"

"Prelates, if you like—bishops, *no*! A bishop is a simple pastor, an overseer of his flock, not a man who wears a mitre and lawn sleeves, who lives in a palace on so many thousands a-year, and who is called 'my lord.'"

"Dear me!" said Dr. Redmayne, abruptly, "but those are very—very—what shall I say?—very *undesirable* sentiments to cherish! You forget, my dear sir, the orders of the ancient Church."

"No, I do not. I have read Church history to some purpose during the last three years. Also, I have studied the Fathers, and I have endeavoured, by God's help, to form an impartial and unbiassed estimate of what I need. I find in the New Testament, bishops, deacons, and elders spoken of; but the bishops do not in the least resemble either the Roman or the Anglican prelates, and the deacons are undoubtedly, as nearly as possible, what the deacons in Nonconformist churches are supposed to be."

"I know very little—nothing, indeed—of Nonconformity," returned the doctor, rather loftily. "I am a true son of my venerable and well-beloved Mother-Church. Romanism I entirely deprecate; even the Anglican movement seems, to the best of my opinion, unwise, and tending to extremes which may be dangerous in their issues. Dissent I abhor! My dear Mr. Seaton, I hope, I fervently trust, you have not walked out of the communion of Rome into that of—*schismatics*!"

"Schismatics—no! The great body of Dissenters are not schismatics, though some of them, perhaps, *may* deserve the name. The great schismatics of the day are the Anglicans. It is they who are separating themselves from Christ's truth. If the army in which I am enrolled turn traitor—if it go over to the enemy, either covertly or openly—who is the renegade? I, who straightway leave

the ranks, and fight for my King under other banners ; or he who marches on with the regiments whose loyalty has been transferred ? ”

“ But, tell me—are you a Dissenter ? ”

“ I suppose I am. There is no State Church in America, you know ; and there it is that my Protestantism has grown up. But so far I have not identified myself with any denomination. Nevertheless, after the manner which you, I suppose, would stigmatise as heresy or schism, so worship I the God of my fathers.”

“ I am astonished ! I should have thought a pious Roman Catholic would surely have found his spiritual rest in a church of the Lutheran or Reformed order. It is such an immense stride from Romanism to Dissent.”

“ Thank God—yes ! May it ever remain so ! may no false compromises ever bridge over the gulf that lies between ! If I had been merely an emotional convert ; if I had owed my reclamation to any leader of any sect ; had I simply laid down one set of obligations to take up another which chimed in with preconceived ideas—I should doubtless have cast in my lot with the Episcopal churches. But, as it was, a slow, painful awakening ; a gradual loosening of old ties ; a season of doubt, darkness, and almost despair ; a long struggle, and a close, painful, prayerful examination of every tenet and every proposition which presented itself, gradually—and, I think, *naturally*—landed me in Nonconformity. I vowed to myself that I would have no religion at all if I must take one at secondhand ; so I waited till I could see, with my own mind’s eyes, the light by which I walked.”

“ But, my dear Mr. Seaton, think how much you yield, how much you sacrifice ! Is not the English Church the stronghold of Christendom—the bulwark of Christian faith ? ”

“ Forgive me, if I say that I think *not* ! You forget that I have been a Romanist, and that I know better than even you can tell me how completely the English Church is playing the game of Popery. The Church of England has done immense service in her day—and so has the Church of Rome, for that matter ! but, it is not expedient now that either of them should arrogate to herself a domi-

nant authority. The days of the hierarchy are numbered."

"And how long, then, will Nonconformity exist, think you? Will that also do its work and then decline in the ecclesiastical scale—supposing, that is, that it ever gains the ascendancy?"

"There will certainly come a day when Nonconformity will cease to exist, because there will be no longer any question of Conformity. Politically speaking, Dissent will disappear when Church disestablishment has taken place. Every church will then stand on its own merits, and one church or sect will be no more the favourite of the State than another."

"Disestablishment!" and Dr. Redmayne groaned aloud. "That I should have lived to hear such a horrible possibility calmly intimated! Disestablishment! Never, never, Mr. Seaton! The idea will never be entertained for a moment by men of weight; do you suppose *Parliament* would ever vouchsafe to discuss any such monstrous proposal? I dare say Dissenters would like it well enough, but they know they might as well cry for the moon as for religious equality."

"I think the time is coming when the question *will* be before the Parliament, before the whole nation; when the Press will freely treat of it, when it will be debated far and wide and among all classes; when Episcopalians as well as Dissenters will demand disestablishment, not as a boon, but as right which must sooner or later be conceded."

"My dear sir, your American associations have utterly deluded you. There is no chance of such a contingency, I assure you. You will find that out for yourself before you have been six months in England. Why, what would become of the clergy? Half of them who have neither gifts of preaching, nor influence, nor patronage, nor private property, would *starve*!"

"Let us hope they would find something else to do. They need not starve, you know, though I am afraid a good many of them are little better than starving now. Mother Church has by no means apportioned her favours with impartiality. But the sooner men who are in the

priest's office simply that they may eat a bit of bread are out of it the better!"

"Pray, when shall we find the Church tumbling about our ears? How soon will the storm commence?"

"It is muttering even now. In twenty years to come, Dr. Redmayne, the disestablishment of the National Church will be the grand question of the day—it will then be only a question of time. But, mark me, your Church *will disestablish herself!* Had she been true to her principles, to the *Reformed* faith, had she kept clear of Rome and her devices, Dissent would never have been able to touch her, so strong was, and is still, in some measure, her hold upon the affections of the people. But when the shepherd betrays the sheep, and coolly hands them over to another and alien fold, time-honoured observances, and ancient ritual, and even long-loved associations lose their power. It is the engrafted Romanism of the Church of England that will be her ruin. In fact, it seems to me that Mother Church is the foolish woman of the Proverbs; she is plucking down her house with her own hands."

Cold as the day was, Dr. Redmayne perspired. In his peaceful, luxurious retirement, "far from the maddening crowd," he had heard from time to time whispers of the dire changes that were impending. His daughter Jessie would have discussed one or two critical questions that had been the subject of leaders in the London newspapers, but he angrily bade her not meddle with matters above her comprehension; and once, when his wife said to him, "I am really afraid, my dear, this Anglican party will divide the Church, and cause dissensions that may terminate most fatally," he replied, "Nonsense, Flora; you women are invariably alarmists; your sex was always partial to earthquakes, and always will be, I suppose. Be comforted, my dear, these threatened upheavings will not happen in our time. Not in this century will there be any disastrous ecclesiastical changes. What another age may bring forth, we cannot tell; but that will not matter to us; we shall be gathered to our fathers ere the cloud grows dark upon the horizon."

Aubrey was sorry that the conversation had taken such a turn, and he feared, too, lest he had spoken with more

than becoming vehemence, for Dr. Redmayne was his host, and at least a quarter of a century older than himself. And yet it behoved him to speak out the very truth that was in his heart, and his residence in America had doubtless endowed him with a precocity of judgment and opinion far exceeding that of the generality of the men of his age, and of the party he perforce must join, unless he kept himself aloof from all ecclesiastical and political controversy. It was a relief when old Crake hobbled up the aisle to where they stood, and said, "They're a-coming, yer Reverence, and the townsfolk are trooping down into the churchyard."

The funeral procession was still at some distance, but the townspeople hurried to take their seats within the church, the greater portion of the choir, however, being reserved for the friends and family of the deceased. Dr. Redmayne withdrew to put on his surplice, and Aubrey and Millicent sat with Mrs. Redmayne and her daughters in a pew that commanded a full view of the whole church. He wondered where Edith and Father Fabian would be.

Presently the muffled peal ceased, and the deep tones of the solitary knell filled the wintry sky. A few minutes more, and the doctor, solemn and white-robed, walked slowly down to the great western door with his book in his hand, and Aubrey knew that once again were spoken those words of immortal cheer which have comforted the whole Christian Church for ages—" *I am the Resurrection and the Life!*" A little longer, and the dark procession entered the choir; the Seatondale estatesmen and tenants, according to ancient custom, bore the coffin on their shoulders. Among the pall-bearers were the Duke of Aldinghame, the rector of St. Ulpha's, several gentlemen of position from Lunechester, and Mr. Clifford, who had declined to take any part in the service. Behind the coffin came the poor little heiress, clinging to the hand of her guardian, Mr. Fabian, and after them the two ladies, so closely veiled that Aubrey could scarcely be certain which of them was Edith.

It was not a splendid funeral, for the General's last wish had been scrupulously respected; but it was a grand funeral for all that, so many people of all classes and all

ages thronged to testify their respect for the departed master of Seatondale. At last arrived the moment for carrying the coffin into the vault; here only those who were invited, or "bidden," to the funeral were permitted to enter. But Aubrey and Millicent took up their station with the mourners, and stood close to Dr. Redmayne as he enunciated the solemn "ashes to ashes, dust to dust." To Aubrey it was like a dream, for the scene carried him back to that long-past April day when he had heard the same words from the same lips, and watched with compassion the sorrowful, heart-anguished face of his bereaved kinsman, and then, as you will probably remember, he had atoned to his conscience for witnessing this heretic ceremony by repeating the "Litany for the Dead," and that other Litany for the Conversion of England, and he had trembled as he thought of the fate of those who had died unfortified by the sacraments of the Catholic Church.

Now he could join heart and soul in the beautiful prayers to which he listened; now he knew that salvation was of Christ, and not of any Church, as such, however holy, however ancient. The horrible nightmare that had oppressed him was gone; he had suffered much, for not in a single day could he cast away the yoke of those who had been to him as God; there had been a painful and weary struggle, but the hour of release arrived, and he came out of the darkness and the malaria of Rome into the clear, warm, healthful sunshine of God's unmingled truth. And now tears of gratitude filled his eyes; it was so sweet to be at peace with himself, and to feel that his Father's face was turned towards him, and the light that can never be dimmed shining on his heavenward path.

He had scarcely seen Fabian, for during the whole service in the church he had covered his face; but now, as he heard the final blessing pronounced, he saw, with the torchlight full upon it, the countenance he knew of old so well. He gazed in astonishment; Fabian was so strangely, sadly altered, he was but the wreck of the trusted and honoured priest of St. Omer. He was aged and bent, his cheeks and temples were hollow; his eyes—those piercing falcon eyes—were dim and heavy, his features were sharpened to attenuation, he looked like one who dreads some

grim avenger, and is all aweary of his life. Something of the old love and reverence fluttered in Aubrey's heart as he gazed upon that mournfully altered visage, and he said to himself, "I must not be hard with him! It should not be my voice that proclaims his falsehood, and yet—and yet—how can I withhold the truth? Perhaps he repents—God grant that it may be so."

By this time all was over, and the funeral party thankfully left the cold vault, which was fitter for the dead than for the living.

Aubrey went straight up to Mr. Clifford, saying, "You have not forgotten me, I hope?"

Mr. Clifford started, as well he might, and in the same moment Fabian looked up and saw his recusant pupil. A livid pallor overspread his countenance, and he leaned against a distant pillar to support himself. Aubrey turned to him, and, after a moment's hesitation, put out his hand. It was not taken. Fabian gazed at him as if he were a ghost, and in a hollow tone whispered, "My God, Aubrey! how came you here?"

"I came to my uncle's funeral; I only arrived last night. Four days ago I was crossing the sea on my way home from America. I wish now I had hastened my return."

"I wish you had. What are you going to do now?"

"I shall return with you to Seatondale. I think, as the child's nearest relative, I have some claim."

"Undoubtedly! And what next?"

"What next, Father Fabian?"

"Do you come to tell the world what a traitor I have been?"

"I do not know; I would fain spare you; but I make no promises. I am a Protestant!"

"I guessed it. And what is more I am not sorry for it. I shall never leave the communion of our ancient Church; but—but—my views are changed. I will explain hereafter. We cannot converse here."

And then Aubrey and Edith were clasping hands again, though scarcely a word was exchanged between them. As the ladies drove home across the snowy fells Mrs. Clifford said to Edith, "You never told me you knew Aubrey Seaton. Now I know who it was that you refused to



marry years ago. He could not have come back at a more fitting and convenient period ; it strikes me that he will put many crooked things straight for us. We shall see and hear much that is surprising, I expect. And now we shall understand the mystery of his long absence, the inexplicable silence which so grieved the dear General."

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## CHAPTER XLI.

### FABIAN STATES HIS RESOLVE.

" Because I knew not when my life was good,  
And when there was a light upon my path,  
But turned my soul perversely to the dark—  
O Lord, I do repent.

" Because I spent the strength Thou gavest me  
In struggle which Thou never didst ordain,  
And have but dregs of life to offer Thee—  
O Lord, I do repent.

" Because I called good evil, evil good,  
And thought I, ignorant, knew many things,  
And deemed my weight of folly weight of wit—  
O Lord, I do repent."

THE wintry afternoon was fast fading into night when the funeral party once more reached Seatondale. More snow had fallen there than at Chalfonts and on the coast ; and the fells and higher peaks beyond were as white as Mont Blanc himself. The roads were heavy ; the trees were covered with frosted rime ; the noisy beck that was wont to babble over the rocks for several miles of the solitary way was silent, as it trickled in a slow, slender, half-congealed stream underneath the ice. Here and there were long icicles drooping from the crags ; the brambles and briars that overhung the banks were like huge sprays of pearl, or colourless, pure coral, while the mere itself was frozen hard and smooth, and all around it stood up

stark and stiff the dead rushes and water-flags of the departed summer.

Dr. Redmayne, Mr. Threlkeld, Aubrey, and Millicent occupied one carriage. The rector was greatly exercised in his mind for several reasons, not the one of least account being that which led him openly to deplore the extreme inconvenience of his present situation. "You see," he said to Aubrey, "I feel compelled to accompany Mr. Threlkeld to Seaton this evening, for I was the last person, and perhaps the only person, with whom our lamented friend spoke openly on the subject of his private affairs. In fact, as chief witness of that codicil, which I told you of just now, and which pretty well upsets Fabian, I suppose I am bound to put in an appearance. But it is extremely awkward. To return to Chalfonts to-night is out of the question, and there is the usual service in the church to-morrow morning, at eleven o'clock. And if it should snow heavily during the night, I cannot think what I shall do. A pretty thing if I cannot get back to my duties to-morrow morning!"

"Cannot your curate be responsible?" asked Aubrey.

"He must be for the prayers; but he is not in full orders, and cannot therefore take the whole service. I left him one of my old sermons, however, in case the worst should come to the worst; but the real difficulty lies further on. To-morrow is one of our great Sacrament Days, and people make a point of staying. Now my curate, being only a deacon, cannot possibly officiate alone. It's very awkward! my heart misgave me when I found the funeral was fixed for Christmas-eve. If it had only been yesterday, it would not have been such an anxiety, for I could have managed to get back, by hook or by crook, with twenty-four hours at my disposal."

"I do not think it looks like another snow-fall," replied Aubrey. "The frost is intense, and the horizon clear: I can almost promise you a real old-fashioned Christmas-day, bright, sparkling, and bitterly cold. I wonder how many degrees of frost the thermometer registers this evening."

"From fifteen to twenty, I should say," returned the doctor, shivering, and wrapping his rug round his knees.

"I feel almost down to *zero*, and none the more comfortable for the dilemma in which I am placed. I am half-inclined to take a vow never again to engage a curate who is not in priest's orders. It's all very well giving young fellows their title for orders, but it doesn't answer—one has more trouble than enough, and in a case like the present, there is a very serious difficulty."

"You seem as hampered as the Church of Rome," said Aubrey. "What difference can it make to the administration of Holy Communion whether it be presided over by priest or deacon? For my own part, I have frequently taken the bread and wine, with great comfort and profit, from the hands of laymen. So long as Christ is present—mind, I don't mean in the elements—it matters little who else is absent. It seems to me that both Oxford and Rome are altogether wrong on this subject of the Lord's Supper."

"And it seems to me," said Dr. Redmayne, striving to keep his temper, "that the sacraments of Dissenters are no sacraments at all! But, for Heaven's sake, don't let us get into any controversy! I am cold, and hungry, and worried, and I never can, and never will, argue on an empty stomach, or with feet as cold as stones. Only I must just observe, that for an ex-Romanist you hold very singular opinions."

"Very singular indeed!" muttered Mr. Threlkeld, who liked the frigid weather and the enforced journey no better than the clergyman. "And I think, Mr. Seaton, you had better have remained a devout Catholic than cast in your lot with *schismatics*, who ought to be put down by Act of Parliament. I am a good Churchman, and I would as soon be a Mahomedan as a Quaker or a Methodist."

Clearly Aubrey's best course just now was to hold his peace, though it did seem to him superlatively ridiculous that this luckless curate, whom his own Church acknowledged as lawfully ordained, should be judged incapable of duly administering the sacrament. Moreover, he received a private pinch from Millicent, which was intended to admonish him to be discreet, and refrain from any further exposition of his views. All were glad when the

carriage stopped at the great hall-door, and the lights and glow of numerous fires shone out upon the snow from the many-windowed house. The hot luncheon which was provided was in fact an excellent dinner, and after a judicious course of clear soup, roast sirloin, roast capon, mellow ham, hot mince-pie, Stilton cheese, and splendid old port, Dr. Redmayne, who was far from an unamiable man, recovered his temper, and blamed himself that he had spoken so harshly to Aubrey, who might, perchance, be brought back again to the paths of orthodoxy, as represented by the respectable, slow-going, High and Dry Church of England, which he himself affected.

"We had better go to business at once," said Mr. Threlkeld, when he had finished a Ribston pippin, and tossed off a bumper of wine. "The servants had better attend. Mr. Fabian, shall I give orders, or will you?"

"If you will assume the executive, I shall feel grateful," replied Fabian. "I do not know at present how far my authority in this house extends. Pray issue what orders you think proper."

Mr. Viner was then desired to summon the other servants, and as they were expecting the summons, they quickly filed in, and stood crowded together at the lower end of the large room. It had been a question whether Beatrice should be present or not, and it was finally ruled that she should decide for herself. The poor little thing, however, was so overtired that she declined to join the party below, and indeed, as soon as she had eaten some hot bread and milk, fell asleep on the sofa by the nursery fire, and no one had the heart to disturb her till late at night, when it became necessary to undress her and carry her to her bed.

"Ladies and gentlemen, and my friends at the other end of the room," said Mr. Threlkeld, throwing a glance towards the servants, and laying his hands solemnly on a legal looking document, "I am about to read to you the last will and testament of the late General Seaton, of Seaton Hall, in the county of Fellshire. I myself, in the General's presence, and by his desire, destroyed the previous will made soon after his marriage with Miss Mary Damarel. This will, which I now hold in my hand, was

drawn up when the heiress of Seaton was about two years old ; it was signed and sealed in my presence, as the Rev. John Fabian, of Malham Tower, the Rev. Charles Clifford, of Priest's Croft, Seatondale, and Thomas Viner, the General's old and attached servant, can bear witness."

Then in a loud, clear voice, the lawyer read the will, which was drawn up with all due formality, and need not be given *in extenso* here. Suffice to say, that after legacies specified to the Cliffords, to the old servants, and to a few other people, including some distant kith and kin of the late Mrs. Seaton, General Seaton left all he possessed, without reservation, to Beatrice Mary Seaton, his only child ; and with equal lack of reservation, all powers, legal and discretionary, as trustee and executor of the estates, and sole guardian of the infant heiress, were placed in the hands of "my well-beloved and esteemed friend, John Fabian, of Malham Tower, clerk in Holy Orders, and ordained priest of the Church of England, as by law established."

While this document was being read Fabian never once looked up. He sat in his place, with his face bowed in his hands ; nor did he stir when, after a decent pause, Mr. Threlkeld resumed : "So far, all is perfectly plain and clear. We now, however, arrive at what appears to be a slight complication, since the codicil which I am about to read seriously interferes with the terms in which the Rev. John Fabian's guardianship was at first concluded. The codicil in question—which was signed, as most of you are aware, within thirty-six hours of the decease of our esteemed and lamented friend—distinctly provides that Beatrice Mary Seaton, being a woman child, shall enjoy the privilege of the guardianship of her own sex, in addition to that of the aforesaid John Fabian, clerk, whose responsibilities are limited to the control and management of the estates on behalf of the aforesaid Beatrice Mary Seaton, infant. The codicil also declares that Mrs. Emily Clifford and Miss Edith Armstrong are the two ladies to whose care the General confidently commits his orphan child. Till she is of age, she is to reside constantly with either Mrs. Clifford or Miss Armstrong ; they conjointly are to choose her instructors and servants, and no person—not

even the Rev. John Fabian—can legally interfere between Miss Seaton and these ladies. One other clause deserves special mention:—Should the aforesaid Rev. John Fabian, of Malham Tower, feel at all disinclined, under these circumstances, to act as guardian to the child, in respect of her pecuniary interests, he has simply to refuse the responsibility, and it then lies with Mrs. Clifford and Miss Armstrong to choose for themselves such a coadjutor as shall appear to them most expedient. I may also remark that in connection with this not improbable contingency, the Duke of Aldinghame was mentioned by the General himself. I think, at least, you distinctly said so, Dr. Redmayne?"

"I did say so. Our dear departed friend spoke very strongly in favour of the Duke. Had Heaven seen fit to prolong the life that was so suddenly cut short, he would, I am positive, have communicated with his Grace and entreated him to accept the responsibility. Had the Duke of Aldinghame declined—which was not at all likely—I have every reason to believe that General Seaton would have applied to myself, and I need not say that in any way, and in every way, I am at the service of the ladies as the faithful friend of the little heiress."

"I will proceed to read aloud this important though irregularly-framed *codicil*," said Mr. Threlkeld, as he stood up and carefully wiped his spectacles, "though I am bound to observe that, in spite of irregularity, it is a perfectly legal instrument, and could not be successfully disputed in any court of law. That lamp a little nearer, if you please, Mr. Seaton. Thanks, that will do."

And then, slowly and distinctly, Mr. Threlkeld read out the codicil, and finally showed the trembling, blotted signature of the dying man, while the witnesses attested theirs. After which there was an awkward silence, and all present, save Edith and the Seatons, looked curiously at Fabian, who still sat motionless a little to the right of the lawyer, his brow resting on his hands, and his elbows on the table. Dr. Redmayne was the first to speak.

"Mr. Fabian, we await your decision."

"Is it necessary to decide at once?" he asked, slowly lifting his head, and showing his haggard, careworn counte-

nance, the expression of which was to Aubrey most startling—most incomprehensible.

"There is no time like the present, I should say," remarked Mr. Threlkeld. "You have simply to declare you will or you will not, you know, Mr. Fabian. If you will pardon me for expressing an unasked opinion, I may just say that if I were in your place I would leave Miss Seaton and her fortunes alone. You will thereby save yourself a world of perplexity and annoyance."

"Is it necessary that the servants remain pending my decision, if it *must* be spoken now?" inquired Fabian, proudly.

"Well, no; I should imagine not—eh, Mr. Threlkeld?" replied Dr. Redmayne. "The servants have listened to all that concerns themselves, and eminently satisfactory to them those clauses of the will must be. But with the codicil, which does not touch the testamentary disposition of property, they are certainly *not* concerned, and may therefore, I should conclude, leave us to ourselves?"

Mr. Threlkeld mutely acquiesced, and Mr. Clifford, speaking at the instance of his wife, said, rather timidly, "This business is undoubtedly of a private nature, affecting a few persons only. We can scarcely, I think, expect Mr. Fabian to open his mind before so miscellaneous an audience."

At which Mr. Viner and Mrs. Jeliffe marshalled off their forces, and Aubrey sprang up to say, "Shall we retire—Millicent and I? We have certainly nothing to do with the affair in question. Our little cousin has our deepest, truest sympathy; more we cannot offer."

"Stay! I pray you, stay, Aubrey!" was Mr. Fabian's hasty answer. But in the words "I pray you," there was something of the old tone of command which Aubrey so well remembered. He resumed his seat; Millicent had not stirred. All awaited Fabian's decision. "I think you are right, Dr. Redmayne," he said at length, his voice, though husky with suppressed emotion, being steady and distinct—"if it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly.' As it appears to me that I see my duty before me, I need not any longer listen to the *pros* and *cons*. which my own inclination would suggest. My mind is fully made up. I do accept the trust confided to

me some few years since by the man whose memory will ever by me be cherished with unmingled affection and deep gratitude. Mrs. Clifford and Miss Armstrong, I am ready to act with you, in any way you may think proper, to the best of my ability."

"Are you *quite* sure, Mr. Fabian, that, as a duty, you accept the guardianship of this child?" asked Mrs. Clifford, in a tone which, in spite of herself, was cold and rigidly constrained. She had fondly hoped that she would be spared the dreaded annoyance which now seemed inevitable. To be associated with this man, whom she had from the first distrusted, and of whose falsehood and treachery she was fully persuaded, was to her terrible in the extreme.

"As in God's presence I declare to you all here assembled," replied Fabian, growing more and more deadly pale as he spoke, and clasping his hands like one in agony, "that only to serve Beatrice Seaton and her interests, both temporal and spiritual, I accept this sacred trust, and force myself, as it were, upon those who look upon me as capable of any base deceit. God is my witness that I mean nothing but good towards the dear child, and if by laying down my life I could secure or enhance her true happiness and well-being, I think I should not hesitate. Come what will, I know that if I ever meet her father in that eternal world which he has entered, and towards which I hasten, I shall meet him, as far as regards this trust, with a conscience blameless of offence. Yes, ladies and friends, now, and once for all, I accept the duties, limited though they be, assigned me by the will of General Seaton."

"Fabian!" said Dr. Redmayne, "I do not wish to give you any needless pain, but I feel that I should not discharge my trust, if I did not, in the presence of these witnesses, declare to you most solemnly, and on the word of a Christian clergyman, that General Seaton—whatever may have been his desire in time past—most earnestly wished to appoint some other guardian and executor in your stead. Had he lived twelve hours longer, this will, which I hold under my hand, would have been burned to ashes, and another will, from which your name was to have been purposely excluded, would have been drawn up, and legally completed. And the codicil? Well! the codicil was



hastily and roughly framed, and as hastily and roughly signed and witnessed, for the express design of traversing the will already in existence; lest—and the poor old man evidently had a strong presentiment of his approaching end—lest he should not survive to make entirely fresh arrangements as regarded his child. For weeks and months before his death he perceived the desirability of altering his will, so far, and so far *only*, as you were concerned. And at my last interview with General Seaton, he distinctly stated that he had quite resolved to erase your name as guardian, only he could not at once determine who he should appoint in your place. I am fully convinced that he had really decided upon his Grace of Aldinghame, who would have been with us at this moment, but for the illness of his duchess. Some of these facts you know already from Mrs. Clifford, who was in the General's confidence, and who was with him in the last hours of his life. But lest you should not clearly understand in its aspects your present position, I thought it only right, though it might appear harsh and discourteous, to say what I have said. You must now perceive that against the dying wish, and *contrary* to the actual will of the General, you persist in abiding by a document which, though legal, is morally null and void. I cannot say more."

"Dr. Redmayne," returned Fabian, quietly, "I honour you for your candour. In speaking as you have spoken, I acquit you of any uncharitable feeling or any unworthy animus towards myself. Nevertheless, at the risk of a thousand misconstructions, and with the full certainty of incurring an odium which is only natural, and which I cannot blame—though, I confess, I shrink from it—I hold to my resolve, which was solemnly formed at the side of Beatrice's dead father. This will, which my common-sense tells me cannot be controverted, though its provisions are by the codicil entirely altered—I *abide by*! Nothing that can be urged will alter my determination. I shall not resign. While I live Beatrice Seaton needs no other male guardian than myself. That in the momentous charge of this orphan child these two estimable ladies should also be concerned, I am more than thankful. No, I cannot be

questioned, I cannot explain myself, though some day, perhaps ere very long, all that is now dark may be made clear. This much I will say—and then I must request that I be spared any further discussion on the point—if Mrs. Clifford and Miss Armstrong had not been associated in the guardianship, I should, myself, have declined to act. Nothing would have tempted me to assume the sole authority of guardian to this little one. At all costs, I should have firmly declined the personal custody of the *heiress*."

There was so much sadness and earnestness, and so much solemnity in Fabian's tone and manner, that it seemed impossible not to credit him with perfect sincerity. He left the room as he ended speaking, and then those who remained looked at each other with a puzzled and almost baffled expression of countenance.

"Most disgraceful!" growled Mr. Threlkeld. "I could not have believed it. His conduct is unworthy of his cloth—unworthy of any man of honour. The General's expressed wishes, his dying wishes, which a savage might hold sacred—Mr. Fabian coolly ignores and sets at defiance, in the furtherance of his own plans. And what those plans may be, Heaven knows!"

"I must own that I was led away by him while he spoke, but of course a Jesuit will lie through thick and thin," said Dr. Redmayne. "There is not a crime they will not commit, if they believe that thereby they will advance the interests of their Church."

"And their Church is a Moloch," interrupted Mrs. Clifford; "an ever-craving, never-satisfied, remorseless, false deity, who deems no sacrifice of human hearts or human blood too costly to be offered on her altars. I am more than half resolved to decline any share in a guardianship which involves such hateful and dangerous associations."

"Stay, dear friend," implored Edith; "make no rash resolves, I entreat you. Do not forsake me in this work, to which I am pledged by a solemn and irrevocable promise given to the dead. For myself, I trust Mr. Fabian. However false a part he may have played heretofore, I feel assured that now he is dealing as truthfully as we could desire. Let us not concern ourselves; God will cer-

tainly be with us. To Him all hearts are open, from Him no secrets are hid; He can and He will confound the devices of the wicked, if any such there be."

"Mr. Seaton is the proper person to be associated with us," said Mrs. Clifford, who had already heard of Aubrey's change of views. "He is a Protestant; he knows the crafts and snares of the enemy from whom he has freed himself; and he is the child's nearest of kin and only male relative, who would have been master here to-day had she not been born, or had she died in early infancy."

"And who would even now inherit should Miss Seaton die unmarried or childless," put in Mr. Threlkeld. "Mr. Seaton, of course you know you are next heir at present?"

"I suppose I am, now I come to think of it! But though I was once cruelly disappointed, that is all over long ago; and I am quite contented with my own paternal estate of Southerleigh. I earnestly trust my little cousin—who is a very healthy child, as I am assured—may grow up, and in due season marry, and become the happy mother of children who will carry down the name of Seaton—which is always to be hers—through many generations. I would willingly have accepted the office of guardian to the child, had it been offered to me. As it is, I am very ready to be of any service to either of the ladies; and they may rest assured that no harm shall befall them or their charge, if I can possibly prevent it."

"One word!" said Mr. Threlkeld; "was the General right? Is this man a Jesuit—a priest of Rome, in Anglican disguise?"

"I dare not reply in the negative," was Aubrey's grave answer. He would have given much just then if the question had not been asked.

"Then!" cried the lawyer, exultingly, "we shall be too many for him yet! He was appointed guardian, executor, and all the rest of it, as a clergyman of the Church of England. If it can be proved that *he—is—not—that*, it can—if I do not deceive myself—be also proved that he is not the John Fabian named in General Seaton's will. I will go up to London as soon as ever the Christmas holidays are over, and consult counsel: I'll have Dorisforth's opinion."

## CHAPTER XLII.

## MIDNIGHT COUNCILS.

- "Hast thou a sister on whose faithful breast  
Thy heart may rest  
With confidence, still certain there to find  
An answering mind?"
- "Hast thou a sister? One whose constant heart  
Can take a part  
In all thy joys and sorrows? one who shares  
Thy daily prayers?"
- "Hast thou a sister! Then thou hast possessed,  
If not the best  
That God can give thee of all earthly ties,  
Yet a rich prize."

FABIAN returned that night to Malham Tower. When the party in the dining-room broke up, he was missing, and presently Mr. Viner reported that he had been seen setting off, lantern in hand, across the frozen snow. The Cliffords soon after took their departure; Dr. Redmayne and Mr. Threlkeld requested to be shown to their rooms; Edith retired to her own quarters, and Aubrey and Millie sat till late over the dying embers. They had had no opportunity of speaking freely to each other since their arrival at Chalfonts, and neither of them was inclined at present to seek "Nature's sweet restorer."

"I don't feel at all like turning in," said Aubrey, as he and his sister stood together at the gallery-window, on their way bedwards. "Though there is no moon, how light it is! the stars are almost as brilliant as in Canada, and the white cold snow glimmers all around. I say, Millie, I hope it won't snow any more, for Dr. Redmayne's sake; he is in a fine funk, as our transatlantic cousins say, lest he should be weatherbound to-morrow."

"Of course, it would be disagreeable. I wonder what would be the consequence as regards the Christmas-day service? Would the Sacrament be postponed, or would

that chirping little curate, who chatters so glibly about German *chorales*, come to the rescue and courageously defy precedence and prescription ? ”

“ There would be no Sacrament. The poor little fellow dare not go beyond his tether ; it would be as much as his place was worth. But, Millie, I cannot converse in this glacial atmosphere. This good, old-fashioned Christmas, as Mrs. Drewitt called it, freezes one’s very blood and marrow.”

“ I am shivering, in spite of this fur. Come to my room ; I dare say there is a blazing fire there, and we can have our talk in comfort. I am not in the least sleepy. Indeed, I am rather too wide awake, for I cannot yet realise the fact that I am at Seaton Hall, which I once thought would be your house, that the poor General is lying in that dreary vault yonder under the Priory Church, and that I have actually seen and spoken to Edith Armstrong ! ”

By this time they were sitting with their feet on the fender in Millicent’s room. Aubrey looked round, and exclaimed, “ This is the very room I had when I was here before ! Oh, Millie, I hope you will sleep in that bed more peacefully than I did ; I used to lie tossing about counting the hours, and longing to lose myself in unconsciousness, till the May morning dawned, and I watched the shadows melt, and the greyness of the fells change into rose and amber. How beautiful it was, and how wretchedly I felt ! ”

“ What made you so wretched ? Not losing the inheritance, surely ? ”

“ No ; though at first I did feel the disappointment acutely. As you know, Millie, I had been brought up—it was a sad mistake—to look upon myself as the heir of Seatondale. I knew that Southerleigh must be mine in due course ; but Father Fabian and our own father were always talking to me of my probable succession here, and of the great things I was to do for the Church as Lord of Seatondale. It was somehow the dream of my boyhood, the restoration of our ancient faith in the North, where once it had been proudly pre-eminent. The conversion of England was what I prayed for day and night. I was

rather of a romantic turn, you know, and Father Fabian and the others at St. Omer took every advantage of my natural enthusiasm, and fanned the fire which had been kindled in my heart of hearts when I was a little lad in petticoats. All my devotion was for our Lady; all my ambition for my Mother Church, and very pure was that devotion, very unworldly that ambition. For in those days I never doubted—how could I?—that in battling for Rome I strove and fought for the glory of the Eternal God, and for the furtherance of the heavenly kingdom. That there was salvation outside the pale of *the Church*, I had not the least conception."

"Do you know, Aubrey, I had such an idea when I was a very little girl? I must have been of heretic engrain! It seemed so hard, that only a very few of the human race should be saved; as I grew older, I rebelled at the limitation, as I supposed, of God's mercy. I began very early to torment myself with the vexed questions of theology. One day, in particular, I well remember; it was soon after Adeline's profession, and immediately after my own first Communion, which was not made, in my case, quite so early as is the rule, I suppose on account of that strange illness I had when I was in my tenth year. Well, Aubrey, I sat under the great chestnuts—they were in full flower, I recollect, and the rose-touched snowy petals fluttered down upon me, and upon the page I read—and somehow, child as I was, the chestnut flowers and the doctrine of the book I held seemed painfully at variance. I had no Bible, but I had a little volume of texts—with *notes*, of course—for Rome never leaves the Bible in its simple integrity, and this passage had impressed itself in my mind:—'Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?' And, Aubrey, I thought—surely even then, God by His Blessed Spirit spoke to me, a child—I thought—'And if God cares so much for the flowers, and the birds, and the beasts of the field, as I have learned that He does—if He is so kind

and tender to all His creatures that have not souls—how is it that He is so hard upon the people who are born to live for ever? Only the Catholic can be saved from eternal misery; and there are thousands—*millions*!—who are not, and never will be Catholics, and many of them are not in fault, for they know nothing of the one true Church, for they are heathens, or else they have been bred in error. Why, then, should they be lost? Why should God create human souls, and at the same time doom them to hell-fire? Can He be so good, so kind? Can He be, indeed, ‘our Father’? You see, the chestnut blossoms preached one gospel, and my book, which was a sort of manual for Confirmation, entirely another gospel, which did not answer to its name, for it was not by any means ‘good news’ to all mankind. Aubrey, child as I was—such a child! but lonely and naturally thoughtful—I cried passionately, thinking of the countless thousands who must be damned, because they did not worship the Queen of Heaven and go to confession, and obey our lord the Pope! I am quite sure that in my own heart, though I knew it not, I appealed against the Councils of my Church—against the decrees which I had been taught to receive as infallible and divine—to *God Himself*! And I prayed under those chestnut trees that God would have mercy upon England, and hasten her conversion, and reunite her to the ancient faith and communion of the Holy Catholic Church. And then I thought if England, why not Europe? and if Europe, why not the world, which all belongs to God? And I fell into a great passion of prayer that all the world might be brought to Christ and be saved. And I thought if I, a poor, sinful girl, so long for the world’s salvation, must not God much more desire it? And if He desire it shall it not be? Is not Christ the King of Glory? Is He not to put down Satan under His feet? Aubrey, I suppose in that hour I became a heretic, though no one guessed it, not even myself, for I should have shuddered at the merest notion of wandering from the fold.”

“I wonder Father Fabian never found you out. How did you manage at confession?”

“I did not manage at all; I just told him how I had prayed for the world’s conversion, and he applauded.

Somehow it never occurred to me to tell him all the workings of my heart, chiefly, I fancy, because I did not perceive whither they were leading me. Then he was very frequently absent, and Father Eustace, you know,—dear old pet!—never gave any one more trouble than he could help. I talked to him about my desire for the salvation of all mankind, and he sadly said it could not be, but that if I offered a certain prayer every hour of the day, and whenever I awoke in the night, together with an *Ave Maria* and a *Paternoster*, I should certainly obtain my wish in part, so far at least as England was concerned, and that I should be greatly blessed myself, and obtain an indulgence of—I don't recollect how many days!"

"Have you forgotten the prayer?"

"No, indeed, I can use it still, though in quite another sense from that which its compilers intended. I wonder how often I repeated it in those days: you must know it well enough yourself; it is only a portion from the Litany for the Conversion of England:—'That it may please Thee to preserve the Catholics of this land from all sin and scandal.

"That it may please Thee so to adorn their lives with solid piety, that others, seeing their good works, may glorify Thee, our Heavenly Father.

"That it may please Thee to enlighten the hearts of all schismatics who live out of the Church, seriously to apprehend the danger of their state and the great importance of eternal salvation. We beseech Thee to hear us, O Lord.'"

"Ah yes! I have said those very words more times than I can count. And so in England Dissenters are counted as schismatics!"

"According to the version of Mr. Threlkeld and Dr. Redmayne. It seems to me, Aubrey, that the great stumbling-block which has always lain in the path of the English Church is her persistent and most fatal error of mistaking uniformity for unity. To the former, which is nothing but a myth, and unattainable as the pretended elixir of life, she has sacrificed the latter. To strive for uniformity is indeed to chase a phantom, for the very variety which exists in unity renders uniformity an impos-



sibility. As for being accounted schismatic, that is nothing, for hard words, you know, break no bones, and after all the question is—*what is schism?* ”

“ Millie, it is getting late, and I did not come here to-night to discuss theology. I wanted to ask you, how is all this coil with Father Fabian to end ? ”

“ How, indeed ! There seems to be but the one alternative of exposing the whole tissue of deception. You cannot keep silent any longer ; and if you could, I could not. We are just a little too late ; we *ought*, as a simple matter of duty, to have spoken explicitly at least a year ago.”

“ It is very good of you to share the blame which attaches to myself alone. You knew very little of the farce which was enacted here ; you did not know the extent to which our honourable-minded, trusting uncle was being deceived. Above all, Millie, you were not an active party to that deceit as I was, for I wrote that wretched letter upon which the whole shameful plot was founded.”

“ I do not see how you could help yourself, THEN. You were taught to render unquestioning obedience ; you were a mere boy, for you had been up to that period in leading-strings, and every spark of free inquiry in your mind had been systematically trodden out from the days of your infancy. In a word, you were Father Fabian’s well-trained pupil.”

“ Up to that hour I was Father Fabian’s bond *slave* ! He was to me as God ; I never dreamed of resisting his authority ; it never occurred to me to doubt his infallibility ; but when I had—at his command, and in virtue of my oath of obedience—written that lying, treacherous letter, my bondage was ended, though then I knew it not. And when I understood what was purposed, when I knew the disguise that was to be employed, I grew sick at heart, and wished I had never been born. Of course I shall have to confess my own complicity. I must see Father Fabian the first thing to-morrow ; he ought to know the admission I made this evening, and to be aware of the fact that I shall openly and fully confess my own share in the deception. Perhaps he will choose to leave this neighbourhood without again meeting those upon whom he has so long imposed a lie.”

"I should think he would. The false Anglican will never face the enemies of the Jesuit priest. Yes, Aubrey; it will be better that you see him alone, before any further revelations are made. We need not be hard upon him, for he looks sadly broken down. Let him go whither he will, Rome will welcome back her faithful child."

"I am not so sure of that! Rome is not over gentle in the matter of failures; and this Malham affair, which must have been most costly, is turning out as complete a failure as Fabian's worst foes could wish. After all, Fabian is as much the tool and creature of the hierarchy of Rome, as I once was his tool and creature. He looks, as you say, terribly broken down; I wonder whether he is getting into trouble with his own party."

"It may be! A system of deceit and treachery must necessarily, from time to time, recoil upon itself. And yet, Aubrey, yet, though we know certainly that this man has lived one long monstrous lie ever since he came here, there seemed to me, to-night, the very ring of truth in his words! He spoke and looked like a true man. It seems an infatuation, but I felt when he was speaking that he would be a true friend, at all costs, to little Beatrice Seaton."

"And I felt the same myself. Still, one must not trust to mere impressions. Perhaps—for nature is very strong—he feels now how basely and cruelly he deceived the man who was his faithful friend—deceived him, too, in his tenderest point. A proud man, like my uncle, must have suffered acutely when he first began to doubt the honesty of one whom he had trusted so completely. And when he felt his suspicions grow to certainty, the pain of his mind must have been very great. From what Mrs. Clifford and Dr. Redmayne say, he, at one time, allowed himself, as was very natural, to be indoctrinated with a good deal of the Anglican spirit, on which Romanists are trading so successfully; and this, also, towards the end of his life, caused him many deep regrets. When I think now much wrong and sorrow would have been prevented had I had the courage to speak out years ago, I feel as if I could not forgive myself."

"My dear brother, you were no more to blame at the

time you speak of than was I. You thought you were doing God service."

"I did think so; and yet my whole being revolted at the fraud and trickery in which I assisted. But whenever my conscience reproached me, I answered it with the pabulum of the Church's authority as represented in the person of my spiritual director. I said to myself, 'Who are you, Aubrey Seaton, that you dare to question the wisdom and policy of one set over you by God Himself? You have vowed to obey to the death, and obedience is, therefore, your first and only duty, even if you must sacrifice the moral instincts of your nature.' You know the chain of reasoning, Millicent? The first links of it were forged when I was in the cradle."

"If not before you were born! Strange that I could never hug that chain, even from my earliest childhood! Till I was eighteen, however, I believe I was very little inclined to resist the authorities, though I can recall several occasions on which you severely lectured me for laxity in Catholic principle and practice."

"You were more left to yourself than I was. Somehow, Father Fabian interfered less with you than with us."

"Nevertheless, he tried hard to persuade me that I had a religious vocation, and he drew the most celestial pictures of convent life. All in vain! He might as well have sought to convince the wild woodlark that it is better to live in a cage than to range the skies at will! Papa never forgave him the attempt; he took a sort of repugnance to Father Fabian thenceforth. 'He might let me keep *one* of my own children whom God has given me!' he used to say. 'Is our holy religion to make Molochs of us?' When at last all connection between Father Fabian and Southerleigh was severed, I think both papa and myself felt as if the atmosphere of our daily lives was cleared from no end of noxious vapours and threatening storm-clouds. We seemed to live in a clearer and purer air. And when I had dismissed that maid whom I had taken at his request, or rather at his command—for I had no choice but to obey—I felt like a person suddenly set free from some mysterious restraint."

"No doubt she was one of his spies. You did well to

get rid of her. Depend upon it, Millie, we acted wisely when we determined to withdraw ourselves entirely from former influences and old associations. Only, having quite made up our minds on the most important subjects, and having determined what our course should be, I am afraid we loitered too long in the pleasant and easy paths of irresponsibility. My poor uncle! how I do wish we had returned last year, instead of going again into Canada. But all such wishes are vain, the past cannot be recalled."

"One word more, Aubrey, before you go! You have never asked me my opinion of Edith."

"I waited for you to give it unasked. And, to tell the truth, my mind is so much occupied with Fabian's affairs, that I cannot think of anything else for more than a few minutes together. Well, and what is your judgment?"

"You have not in the least over-praised her. She is charming, though I feel that at present I see her at disadvantage. I never beheld a more lovely countenance, and she looks as good as Mrs. Clifford says she really is. Aubrey, my dear, I am sure she cares for you as much as ever."

"How can you tell? You have not had much to say to each other."

"My woman's instinct tells me. There are some points on which we women instinctively know each other's hearts. You will find I am right."

"I trust you may be! But remember, Millie, that I have a shameful confession to make. I would not, even if this house were not the house of mourning, make one effort to plead my cause, till my share in the Malham conspiracy was fully explained. And Edith is the soul of honour."

"Her beautiful, noble face tells me that. But she will not be too severe, I think. She will not condemn you, for she, being perfectly reasonable, must perceive how entirely you were the victim of circumstances; that, as Father Fabian's sworn ally and pupil, and the carefully trained student of St. Omer, you could scarcely have done otherwise."

"Ah, Millie, my dear little sister, you are partial, too

partial, I fear! Come, it is time you were snug in bed. I will wish you good night. I don't know how the fellows—the unmarried fellows, I mean—who have no sister to open their hearts to, manage to get on at all."

"They sit down in solitude, have a smoke, and chew the cud of all their fancies, till they get sleepy or stupid."

"Not an attractive resource, by any means. I thank Providence, who has blest me with a loving, sensible, patient sister. My dear, I am devoutly glad that *you* are not a nun! Though Heaven, and your own good sense, are to be thanked for that, not Father Fabian. Good night. And I say, Millie, you might knock at my door before you go down to-morrow morning! Late as it is, you are sure to be stirring betimes, and you are aware how apt I am to indulge in matutinal repose. I shall not be at peace till I have had my say out with Father Fabian. I have a great mind to go over to Malham Tower to breakfast! I will, if you can undertake to call me at seven o'clock."

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## CHAPTER XLIII.

### CITED TO APPEAR.

"But didst Thou not, the deep sea brightly treading,  
Lift from despair that struggler with the wave?  
And wert Thou not, sad tears, yet awful, shedding,  
Beheld a weeper at a mortal's grave?  
And is this weight of anguish, which they bind  
On life, this searing to the quick of mind,  
That but to God its own free path would crave,  
This crushing out of hope, and love, and youth,  
Thy will, indeed? Give light! that I may know the truth!"

CHRISTMAS-DAY rose brilliantly clear, and piercingly cold. The frost was intense; but as no more snow had fallen, Dr. Redmayne and Mr. Threlkeld were able to leave Seaton Hall so early that the former was eating a second breakfast in his own dining-room when the Priory bells

began to ring for the morning service. But before these gentlemen set out for Chalfonts, Aubrey, in the grey, chill dawn, was crossing the park on his way to Malham Tower, taking perforce the longer route, because the short cut through the woods was not available, the snow having obliterated all traces of the path.

When the young man came out upon the high heath-land that overlooked the Tower, the sun was just rising, bathing the mountain-tops in ruby mists, and casting pale amber beams on the dark rippling waters of the mighty bay. At first, the tints on land and sea were pale and faint; but in a few minutes the delicate hues had deepened to crimson and ruddy gold; the great waves came rolling in upon the rocky shore in floods of surging purple; the cliffs shone like carved bronze in the red morning light, and every tree and spray glittered as with diamonds, opals, and rubies in the flush of the glorious Eastern sky. Aubrey stood still to drink in the wondrous beauty of the scene; far and wide he had travelled during the last few years, but never had he gazed on Nature clad in fairer, more imperial guise. Tears filled his eyes, and reverence his heart, as he bared his head, in spite of the keen cold, before those majestic altars of the everlasting hills, and he listened with solemn rapture to the deep, low thunders of the billows breaking heavily below the crags. And he said, as he gazed and heard, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: O Lord, my God, Thou art very great: Thou art clothed with honour and majesty. Who coverest Thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain, who layeth the beams of His chambers in the waters."

And then, as he covered his head again and turned to go upon his way, there came a sudden magnificent burst of rosy sunlight, filling the whole snowy ravine, and covering the desolate white moorlands with its celestial radiance, and he could not help exclaiming aloud—

"Earth with ten thousand voices praises God!"

He looked down now upon Malham Tower, and at first he thought he must have missed his track and come upon some other ancient building of that legendary Border

district ; for to his surprise he saw no ruins, but a long line of cloisters, an ecclesiastical looking edifice with tourelles and machicoulis, not much smaller than the venerable peel itself, and beyond these a small but beautiful chapel, with high pitched roof, fine mullioned windows, buttresses, gurgoyles, and all that the revived mediæval taste could possibly desire. All around was silent as the grave ; only the deep sea roll and murmur could be heard ; no bird flitted across the cold upland, no beast of the field gave out its low or bleat to break the stillness of the hour, and the Tower itself, rising darkly from the snow-covered mound, looked stern and dead.

Remembering how early it was—not half-past eight at the latest—Aubrey thought he would examine the cloisters and walk round the chapel before he applied for admission to the Tower. Perhaps the unhappy master of Malham was yet sleeping, forgetting for awhile, in slumber's sweet and thrice blessed oblivion, all his cares and griefs ; if so, let him enjoy that brief respite while he might.

Even the brightness of the great festal day seemed to be shadowed, as Aubrey Seaton looked upon the hoary pile ; though not a cloud was in the sky, something of darkness surely brooded over lonely Malham Tower. It was a mere fancy, of course, but the young man felt strangely saddened, as he gazed down upon the grey old fortress on the knoll ; it looked, he thought, like a prison-house—and a prison-house that held fast its own dread secrets, that might never be revealed. Then, taking the winding path that led to the Tower entrance, he was soon on the very spot where, with his uncle and Fabian, he had stood contemplating the picturesque but uninhabitable ruin, which then sheltered only birds and bats, and sometimes stray sheep and cattle. He looked up ; the windows were now glistening in the morning sun, but there was no sign of life about the place. He turned towards the cloisters, which seemed mainly designed to form a means of communication between the Tower, and the chapel and school-buildings ; they were about a hundred feet in length, but not more than twenty in width, the windows were richly mullioned, though unglazed, and the roof was beautifully groined. Aubrey's experienced eye told him at once that

this was no modern piece of handiwork, but only the ancient building carefully and perfectly restored. Doubtless in summer those open arches were wreathed with roses and woodbine, blithe singing birds hopped from spray to spray; but now all was hushed, bare, and chill, and the ivy, which was rather of a stunted kind, was shrivelled with the bitter frost. At the further end of the passage he found a low and narrow door, sunk in a deep postern, and it was closed, but he turned the handle almost mechanically, though scarcely expecting to gain access to what lay beyond. To his surprise, the heavy door swung back noiselessly on its hinges, and he found himself within the chapel in the dim north transept. Fearing to disturb some one's devotions, he stepped noiselessly along; but the chapel appeared to be empty, save of himself; he stole on, however, as quietly as possible into the choir, and sitting down in one of the carved oaken stalls, looked about him.

"Can this possibly be regarded as a Protestant place of worship?" he asked himself, as he surveyed the high altar with its immense crucifix of gold and ivory, its many tall tapers, its gorgeous drapery, and the swinging lamp which burnt before it. "There is little at Southerleigh," he continued, "which is not here; this is so good an imitation that it might well be mistaken for the real thing, which, in disguise, I suppose it is! And is this how Romanists, as professed Anglicans, are educating the tastes and indoctrinating the beliefs of the English people? Is this sort of practice allowed in the churches of the Establishment? Surely—surely not! This is a private chapel, and only under nominal jurisdiction, I suppose. I saw nothing like this at Chalfonts yesterday; of course, no bishop would permit it. What are bishops, as superior clergy, for, but to keep the inferior clergy in due order, and prevent them from infringing on the rubric?"

Though all without was bathed in beauteous sunlight, all within was dim, mysterious shade, save where here and there fell slants of deep rich colour from the stained windows, upon pillar, arch, or corbel. Slowly, and like a transfiguration, grew from the great eastern window a radiance of crimson, rose, violet, and amber, flooding the



chancel, and lighting up the symbolic devices and arabesques of the walls as with a glory unspeakable. The altar-lamp's poor meagre flame was altogether quenched in that grand blaze of rainbow-tinted light. Then, for the first time, Aubrey saw that he was not alone in the chapel; something moved on the lowest step of the altar. He drew near the screen, and saw prostrate on the marble a figure which he knew at once to be that of Fabian. He went softly closer, and perceived that the unhappy man's frame was almost convulsed with emotion. He knelt, as I said, on the lowest step of the altar, or rather he lay prostrate there, as one in the utmost depths of mental agony and humiliation; then he raised himself and looked upward to the crucifix, clasping his hands, murmuring an inaudible petition, and then again sinking on the pavement. Aubrey felt that he had no right to remain, watching the private orisons of his sometime friend, and yet he could not bear to go and leave him there without a word of sympathy. He retired as gently as he came to the choir stalls, and there pushed a heavy book so that it fell noisily upon the ground.

The sudden sound in the quiet echoing place produced the effect he wished. Fabian started up, and turned hastily towards the place where his former pupil stood. Never, till his latest day, will Aubrey Seaton forget the *hunted* look upon Fabian's haggard face as he met the wearied, woful gaze of him whom he had come to denounce as traitor. An expression of infinite relief, however, passed over his countenance when he discovered Aubrey's presence; he had evidently expected to behold one far less welcome.

"I beg your pardon for disturbing you, Father," he said, kindly, for in spite of the righteous indignation which had fired his breast, he could feel nothing but compassion for the crushed, broken-hearted creature before him. "I walked over from Seaton to breakfast with you, and finding how early it still was, I thought I would just look round the new buildings before I roused your household. I had no idea that I was not alone in the chapel till a minute or two ago."

"Is it morning?" asked Fabian, confusedly; and then

added, "Oh, yes, of course it is: the place is full of sunshine."

"Why, what time did you rise?" inquired Aubrey.

"I have not been to bed at all. I could not sleep; I was restless, my heart was full of pain and doubts, and I came here last night when I left the Hall. My people do not know that I have returned."

"All night! You must have been well-nigh frozen; the thermometer registers more than twenty degrees of frost."

"Yes, it is cold, I believe; but I scarcely felt it."

"You look *perished*! I know no other phrase to express the look you have."

"I am feeling rather ill and faint. I will sit down for a few minutes."

"Had you not better go home at once and take some food? Your people will be stirring, surely?"

"I suppose so; but I would rather wait here a little if you do not find the atmosphere too frigid."

"Not I! I am impervious to cold; I have had a brisk walk too, and my overcoat would serve a Laplander. But I feel uncomfortable on your account. Do you know, Father Fabian, you are looking extremely ill? My opinion is that at this moment you ought to be in your warm bed, and under medical care."

"I think I am ill, Aubrey. But I have been so utterly disquieted in mind that I have scarcely recognised any bodily ailment. I am like a man in mid-seas on a fast melting iceberg. And yet—yet, thank God! the darkness is receding. I think I see the dawn; I think that after all my feet touch the rock. What have you determined to do?"

"As regards yourself, Father Fabian?"

"As regards my miserable self. But call me 'Father' no more! Call me simply Fabian. Do they know yonder?"

"They do! Only bare facts, though, no particulars as yet. Last night, after you left us, I was plainly asked whether you were a *Jesuit—a priest of Rome*. I could not say you were not; I admitted it, Mr. Fabian, and I take deep blame and shame to myself that I did not speak out several years ago, as soon, indeed, as I renounced those

errors in which you so scrupulously trained me. When you and I parted, I felt humbled to the dust at being made a party to so gross a deception, but the obligations of my oath were upon me. That which I had been taught line by line, and precept upon precept, from my earliest infancy, fettered me, and kept me dumb. But the very silence which made me your accomplice and the accomplice of your Church, then mine also, was the talisman that broke the spell of a lifetime. Then I began to question the infallibility of those decrees which I had hitherto received as from God Himself; then I began to recoil before the system of lies and fraud which I could not but acknowledge to be Rome's cherished policy! Then I began to pray to Almighty God to give me light, to show me truth, to teach me by His own blessed Spirit, and no longer by lips of mortal clay. And the Lord hearkened and heard, and I saw Him as my Father, my Redeemer, my King and Friend. I cast away the vain idols to which I had bowed down, I knelt no more to graven images, I ceased to supplicate saints and angels. I came to Christ alone as my Mediator and Saviour; I said, 'Lord, do Thou save me, *Thou*, none else!' And I was saved."

"Are you *sure* of that?"

"I am. But my interpretation of salvation and yours would differ widely, I imagine. Christ came to save men *from* their sins, to give them new hopes, new joys, new aims, not merely to deliver them from the pains of hell, or to release them from an imaginary purgatory. My heart is given to Him, He has made it His own, He has drawn it to Himself; I cry daily, 'Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!' I have pledged myself to work for Him, to serve Him supremely, to love Him with all my soul, and, if need be, to die for Him! And *therefore*, I dare to say to you, that He has saved me with an everlasting salvation. And now to come back to the point whence I started. I could not, as Christ's servant, keep your secret any longer."

"I should not ask you to keep it, Aubrey; I have determined to make full and free confession. Say what you will; let the truth be known. Also, I would, though I cannot expect any one to believe me, express my deep con-

trition for the past, and implore pardon of all whom I have reasonably offended."

"Nay! seeing you and hearing you, I do believe that you repent. But how is it? Was it the consciousness of *failure* that first opened your eyes to your true position?"

"In the first instance, I frankly believe it was. My work here has been a failure, as it deserved to be, as now I thank my God it was and is. And before I go hence and am no more seen, may He give me grace to undo some of the evil I have wrought here. That I might in some measure make reparation for the past wrongs, I clung to my appointment as the child's guardian; but now, after this long night's watch, I am not sure that I can serve her in any way. I have not quite resolved to yield; but I begin to see how little power I shall have, and also how much better it would be for *you* to act in my place. You have every right; I have none save what I gained by treachery. My injured friend's strong desire was to transmit his inheritance to a Protestant successor. I did my best—I schemed my best—to secure Seatondale as prey for the Church which he dreaded and abhorred. It was not to be! God delivered the innocent out of the hand of the oppressor; He broke the snare. The child and her possessions have escaped; God has set her free, and I—I am bound in her stead."

"In her stead? I do not quite understand."

"Do you not? You ought to know Rome well enough to be aware that she never forgives such transgressions as mine. I might have done penance for murder, for almost any foul crime that did not implicate my superiors; but no penance will suffice to purge me from the guilt of a renegade."

"Do you, then, renounce Romanism?"

"I renounce the ways in which I have walked; but I have no thought of professing myself a Protestant. There are many holy Catholics living to God and serving Him faithfully—with them I shall remain. I will not purchase safety by any kind of cowardly compromise."

"How could you purchase safety? or, rather, what have you to fear? No one among us will seek to punish you for the past; you are free to go where you will and when you will. Do not fear that you will be treated as a criminal."

"Not by you nor by your friends! I believe—I am not sure—but I believe I have not transgressed against any law of the realm! Any Jesuit may do what I have done in this country with impunity. Discovery brings shame and discomfiture, but not legal punishment. I may go out from among you this hour shunned and detested as I deserve to be; but the law cannot lay hands upon me. I am free in England. But that is not the safety of which I speak. Yesterday morning, as I was preparing to join the funeral procession, this was put into my hands. Read it! You, at least, should know its signification."

It was a letter from Rome commanding Fabian's instant surrender of the authority which he held at Malham, and citing him to appear upon a certain day before the supreme tribunal of the Sacred College. All papers and documents he was immediately to give up into the hands of that faithful servant of Holy Church, Gerard Newcomb.

"You will not obey? You will not go to Rome?" asked Aubrey quickly, unable to interpret Fabian's singular expression.

"I shall go in a week or two, when I have made a few arrangements here. I am bound *by oath* to obey! You must be aware of that."

"Doubtless; but can such an oath be binding? To obey this summons is to go to certain death—perhaps torture and bitter shame."

"I know it, and I do not shrink. No, Aubrey, I cannot cast away my chains as you have done. Of my sins I do heartily repent; and I humbly trust an all-merciful God, for Jesus' sake, to forgive me, and receive me at last—if it be after hundreds of years in purgatory—to Himself."

"Oh, my dear old friend," cried Aubrey, seizing Fabian's hand, "credit me, there is no purgatory. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin; no other sacrifice is needed. Believe in Him and be saved everlastingly. Look to Him and be at peace."

"I do look to Him, or else I should lose my reason. But the ancient faith in which I have lived, and in which my fathers lived and died, I cannot give up. I blame not those who can—for my own part I cannot—I *cannot*! Nor does it matter; my course on earth is run."

"Well, I suppose it does not matter in what communion one nominally abides, if only the soul's faith be firmly fixed on Christ. There will be no question of churches or creeds on the other side of the grave. '*Found in Him*'—the Saviour of the world—all will be well. But do not go to Rome, I entreat you; by all the old ties which bound us together in the days of my boyhood, I implore you venture not yourself into the lion's jaws."

"I must, Aubrey; I *must*! I think it is due to those under whom I acted here to give an account of my stewardship. My honour, as well as my vow, compels me. Besides,"—and he lowered his voice and looked hastily round,—“I cannot escape; even here, in free, happy England, I am hemmed in by invisible and powerful foes. God help me! those whom I have so miserably wronged are my friends, and would be, I doubt not, my deliverers, if it might be; while those whom I have slavishly served, and for whom I have perilled my soul, are my cruel and deadly enemies! And I tell you, Aubrey, there is no escape. If I go of my own free will, or if I disappear—*disappear*, mind!—you will understand, and you will think as gently of me as you can.”

At that moment, Damiano stepped forth from behind a pillar, saying meekly, in Italian, “Father, Brother Gerard requests speech of you immediately, before he leaves for St. Ulpha's.”

“I will go with you,” said Aubrey, stoutly; “you shall face no foe alone.”

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## CHAPTER XLIV.

## PLOTS AND COUNTER PLOTS.

"Most delicately hour by hour  
He canvassed human mysteries,  
And trod on silk, as if the winds  
Blew his own praises in his eyes,  
And stood aloof from other minds,  
In impotence of fancied power."

THEY went together to the Tower, where Gerard Newcomb was gravely awaiting his sometime superior. He looked up quickly when he perceived Aubrey, and said, "Excuse me, but my business with Mr. Fabian is urgent and strictly private."

"Allow me to introduce myself," replied Aubrey, trying to speak courteously, that he might not needlessly irritate this subtle emissary of Rome. "I am Aubrey Seaton of Southerleigh, and Father Fabian is the oldest friend I have in the world. He seems to have got into some difficulties of late, and I am anxious to help towards a satisfactory arrangement if possible."

Now Gerard Newcomb was just a little perplexed, for not yet had the appalling news of Aubrey's perversion reached him. The brother and sister had kept profound silence on the subject of religion during their short stay at Southerleigh, and singularly enough no whisper of the truth had come from over seas. Generally speaking, Rome knows everything, as she well may, having her spies in every quarter, and, when practical and expedient, in every family; but in this one instance, she was happily caught napping; and that Seaton of Southerleigh should fall from the faith was one of the last things she would ever have suspected. So Gerard Newcomb scarcely knew whether he ought to be explicit or the reverse. Seaton of Southerleigh was a man of importance, both as regards his own social position as the sole representative of an old Catholic family, and with respect to his nearness of kin to the

young heiress of Seatondale. Aubrey was a person whom he would do well to propitiate, whom, indeed, it might be advisable to take into confidence, either real or seeming—it did not much matter which! Still, his orders were very stringent, the utmost secrecy being commanded. He had pledged himself to deal only with Father Fabian, and with the venerable Dominican at St. Ulpha's, whom simple people respected as a good, kind, inoffensive old man, who never sought to proselytise, and who was not, after all, a very strict Roman Catholic. That he was of the order of St. Dominic, and bound by innumerable ties and oaths to the cause of his Church, and that while he appeared to be as harmless as a dove, he was actually as wise as the wisest serpent, no one ever dreamed! Gerard Newcomb was in a strait; he had provided, as he imagined, for every kind of contingency; but the sudden appearance at such a crisis of Seaton of Southerleigh he had not foreseen, and he could not on the spur of the moment determine on the best course of action.

He bowed deferentially, however, to Aubrey, whom he had never in his life seen before. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Seaton," he replied, suavely. "I feel myself honoured by your presence, and I count upon your judgment in divers perplexing matters of business which have arisen between our dear friend here and myself, as representative of his Eminence! I need not mention names; stone walls have ears, and it is always best to be on the safe side."

"I shall be very happy to express my opinion on any subject," replied Aubrey, "provided I comprehend clearly the premises, and the whole position of the difficulty. So far as in me lies I am at your service, Mr. Newcomb."

"I thank you, Mr. Seaton; it will be an immense relief to share the painful responsibilities now resting solely on myself. Alas, I have not much wisdom, I fear! The Sacred College has—if I may dare to impugn its decisions—sadly overrated my poor abilities. I bow before Father Fabian's grand scope of mind, and yet sometimes—sometimes, you know, Mr. Seaton!—a little faithfulness is worth a great deal of diplomacy! I should wish to speak with you alone, sir."



"With all my heart, if you desire it; though I cannot see why Father Fabian should be excluded; all that I know he knows, and ten times more, and I should not care to keep any State secrets from him."

"Nevertheless, I must entreat a private audience; I will not detain you long."

"Very well. But we can scarcely *ask* Father Fabian, in his own house, to leave the room."

"I am going elsewhere," interrupted Fabian, nervously. "Aubrey, it is useless to fence the question; I am deposed, denounced, and—*condemned!* I am no longer master here—there sits my superior and my judge. He comes armed with an authority that I cannot and will not dispute. I yield to circumstances—not to him!"

And having thus spoken, Fabian retired, to find Mrs. Darcy watching for him on the staircase. She carried him off, almost by force, to her own quarters, and made him eat cutlets and drink hot coffee, whether he would or not. She stood over him, and coerced him as if he were a child, and when he feebly remonstrated said, "Don't tell me! you are absolutely sinking for want of food. An empty stomach makes a coward and a fool of a brave, wise man. You need all your wits, all your energies, all your strength of mind and body to meet the terrible emergencies of the hour. You must eat and drink to save yourself! Why, you look like death. Have you been in the chapel all night?"

"Yes, I felt happier there than elsewhere—the cold did not inconvenience me."

"And I waited for you till two this morning," she returned, reproachfully, "and kept up a blazing fire, and had supper on the table. If I had guessed where you were, I should have come to you with a good stiff glass of hot grog!"

"Athanasia!" remonstrated Fabian, feebly, "I was kneeling at the altar."

"I don't care! you might have been kneeling at ten altars, and I should have come to you with meat and drink, if only some kind angel would have whispered to me of your whereabouts, and, what is more, I would have asked God's blessing on it! There now!"

"You are very bold, Athanasia."

"I need be, because you are not. I tell you, Fabian, we must fight this out. We are in England, remember, and we cannot easily be murdered, or otherwise disposed of. Even in Ireland I should not consider myself personally safe; in Italy or Spain I should prepare myself for speedy dissolution, and calmly await my doom. But in England, *I think*, they will not dare to touch our lives, or our liberty! Thank God for English law, I say!"

"Amen. But touching myself, Athanasia, I shall not long enjoy the privileges of an English subject. A few days, and I must surrender myself to the Supreme Tribunal."

"There is no *must*! There is no Holy Inquisition to seize, gag, and bear you away in the dead of night. In London, perhaps, something might be done in that way; you could be got down to Dover and across the Channel, under the influence of chloroform—I've known it done, and with very little risk either. But we are too far from the Continent here; there are too many miles of railroad, too many railway officials and policemen between us and the sea."

"Nay, the sea is close at hand. Good-sized craft are always in the Estuary. A vessel on a private errand is not bound to start from London Bridge or from Dover Harbour. But I shall go voluntarily."

"You will not! you shall not! Are you mad or tired of your life, that you fling it away without an effort? Once quit British soil, and you know what follows. Or if you don't, I do! Your destruction is more certain than that of the mouse in the cat's claws. Mice do escape sometimes—the Tribunal's victims *never*!"

"I have received my orders. Here is the document of citation."

Athanasia took the paper, and turned ashy pale as she glanced at the contents and at the well-known signature.

"That is very bad, worse than I thought," she said, shaking her head ominously. "I did not know it had come to that. When did this arrive?"

"It came into my hands yesterday morning, very early,

just as I was starting for Seaton Hall. It did not come into my head, at first, that it might be—*what it is*. And my mind was so full of other thoughts, that when once I had thrust it into my inner pocket I forgot all about it, till after I left the party in the Hall dining-room last night. I went into the oak-parlour to recover my composure after the trying scene through which I had passed, and suddenly remembered the untouched packet. I opened it, fearing to find some fresh trouble, yet scarcely apprehending the worst. Then I knew that my dream of serving Beatrice Seaton must be relinquished, some other person must hold my office. And who is so fitting as Aubrey Seaton?"

"Your late pupil? the Popish heir, as the people here call him still?"

"The same, but Popish no longer. He has broken his fetters and is free. He has become a Protestant of the most pronounced type."

"Now the saints be thanked!" cried Athanasia. "He will be a safe ally, he will protect you. And I tell you what, though I risk my soul in saying it, I am pretty well sick of Rome, myself! It would not take much to turn me into a heretic: if they push me too far, either in my own person or by ill-using you, see if I don't proclaim myself a Wesleyan Methodist!"

"A Wesleyan Methodist! *Athanasia!*"

"Yes, a Wesleyan Methodist! I'll have nothing to do with the Anglican Church; it is too much like the Church I quit. It's just a case of mother and child, and the daughter grows more and more like her mother. In a quarter of a century, people will hardly know one from the other. I never could go in for half-measures. If I am not a Catholic, I must be the antagonist of Catholicism. Never mind me! I think, *being in England*, I can hold my own, and you are safe if you only assert yourself."

"But I must obey the summons?"

"You *must* not, I tell you! It is the one thing you must not do! Once set your foot on Papal ground, and the Queen of England and all her Ministers of State cannot help you. Stay here, and your life is safe."

"I am not sure of that; besides, I care nothing about

my life; I would as soon lay it down as not. If God would call me, I should go with joy."

"God's calling and the Cardinal's calling are widely different. I don't wonder you are tired of your life; I have been tired of mine ever since I was forty; but dying peacefully by the visitation of God is one thing, and dying of slow tortures, or in fierce agony, another! I had the martyr spirit in me once, I *think*, but it left me I don't know how many years ago. If I would die for any one, it is for you, my kinsman, who are dear to me as my own son; but die for Rome?—no, no, not for the 'Mystery of Iniquity,' for she is that, and no mistake."

"Athanasia, I will not condemn you, only take care! As to myself, there is my oath, my solemn oath, which I dare not break. I have sworn by the living God that I will render implicit and life-long obedience to our Holy Father the Pope, and the Sacred College, and to the General of the Order of Jesus. And I have invoked the most frightful maledictions on my soul and body, if ever I fail or falter in that obedience. You know something of that kind of oath, I think?"

"I should think I did, having taken a few of such oaths myself. Now, listen: I stand prepared to break every one of them, and I will trust to God to absolve me. Do you the same."

"I cannot! I cannot! I will not close my life in infamy. My career has been steeped in dishonour, it shall not end in perjury. No, Athanasia, it is in vain you tempt me. I have sinned for Rome, now I must suffer by her; it is only the law of compensation."

"If you could hope for the barest chance of justice, I would not so dissuade you. If you might be allowed to plead your own cause, to defend yourself against the machinations of your remorseless enemies, I would say, 'Go, and be true to your trust, and prove your loyalty,' which I know, if they do not, has never wavered. But to hope for a fair hearing is pure insanity! No, you shall not go out of this country if I can help it. I am only an old woman, but Rome has trained me long and well in her craft of fraud and trickery, and now that Aubrey Seaton is here, I think it may be managed."

"What may be managed?"

"Never you mind. Brother Gerard will find that it is a case of 'diamond cut diamond.' And now that you have broken your fast, lie down on that sofa, and, if you cannot sleep, rest your weary, tired limbs. Sleep if you can; I shall not leave you for a moment, and neither Newcomb, nor Damiano, nor that yellow Italian who brought these despatches, shall enter here."

Meanwhile, Gerard Newcomb was pouring into Aubrey Seaton's ears the full story of the Malham mission, and its unprecedented failure. I think he lacked a little of that supreme caution and far-sightedness with which his superiors accredited him, for he showed his hand pretty plainly to the heretic of whose perversion he had not the remotest idea. That Aubrey himself had been virtually an accomplice with Fabian at the outset he knew well enough; that Father Eustace still held sway at Southerleigh he knew also. It never once entered his crafty mind to doubt the firm adhesion of Seaton of Southerleigh. And Aubrey listened, and made few and guarded replies; it behoved him, if he would serve Fabian, whose danger he perceived as clearly as did Mrs. Darcy, not to shut Newcomb's mouth too soon. He must, if possible, know precisely the extent of the present conspiracy, and whom and what it menaced.

He gained his point, for Newcomb, never suspecting the antagonism of his supposed ally, showed his hand completely, so that Aubrey knew pretty well how he would play his cards.

"Then," said Aubrey, when he had come to a clear understanding of Newcomb's meaning, "then the state of the case is this—Fabian has failed in every point of his mission; the Seatondalers will not have Anglicanism; the General would not have Romanism; the heiress is, as you say, in heretic hands; and Seatondale, with all its vast revenues, is lost to the Church, and, as it would appear, lost hopelessly."

"You state the case exactly. Thousands have been lavished here, and actually nothing gained. I am not sure even how long we can legally keep our footing in this place. I have looked over the papers which Father Fabian

holds, and I find them full of flaws; he has shamefully mismanaged everything, as you must at once perceive. The truth is, that he is charged with serving his own purposes, rather than the Church whose sworn servant he is; he must account for the vast sums of money he has expended; he has had his fling, and now his day of reckoning has arrived. He is cited to appear at Rome, as you are probably aware."

"I know; but suppose he should refuse to obey the summons? I must confess, if I were he, I should think twice before I ventured myself in the grasp of the enemy. You confess that he has enemies—powerful ones—at the Papal Court. Depend upon it, his destruction is already compassed."

"He has no choice but to obey. He is bound by oath to appear before the tribunal whenever he is summoned. And if he refused—why, we must take measures to enforce submission."

"That would be difficult in England, would it not?"

"Truly, very difficult, but I assure you not impossible. There are ways and means which I am bound not to disclose. It is necessary that Father Fabian should take his trial at Rome, and to Rome he must journey, whether he will or not."

"When must the journey be taken?"

"As soon as possible. It is all arranged at St. Ulpha's. He is to appear before his Eminence's Chief Secretary early in the new year. Time will be allowed him to prepare his defence afterwards."

"It is useless that he prepare any defence; once in the grasp of that tribunal, and he cannot escape."

Newcomb thought there was something rather odd in Aubrey's tone; but then, he argued, old ties and early associations must still bind him in some degree to Fabian's interest; he did not like to contemplate the humiliation of his former preceptor and friend. Still, Seaton of Southerleigh, as a good Catholic, must not and would not falter when the Church demanded his allegiance, even though a friend and father must be betrayed! Such little sacrifices no faithful son of the Catholic Church ever hesitates to make. And had it been Francis Seaton, instead of his

son, to whom Gerard Newcomb appealed, that gentleman would not have been doomed to the speedy disappointment which awaited him.

"There is only one point on which I am not quite clear in my own mind," resumed Newcomb, "and that is whether something might not yet be gained if he were permitted to remain here awhile, a sort of prisoner on parole, as the guardian of the little heiress?"

"Nothing would be gained. By the will of the late General Seaton my young cousin is entrusted to the care of a clergyman of the Church of England! Now, Father Fabian is not that, and never was that! He will not be allowed to hold office; a legal action will be at once instituted against him if he persist in his claim to the guardianship, or so much of it as the codicil leaves him."

"That codicil, if I understand rightly, takes the heiress entirely out of the hands of Father Fabian, and leaves only her property at his disposal? Now, nothing can be safely done with that in the present state of affairs. But how in the world is it known that Fabian is other than an Anglican?"

"It has long been suspected. And I myself was the person who plainly confirmed the suspicion. By this time the news has spread far and wide, I doubt not; those whom it most concerns know positively, and from my own lips, that *Fabian is a Jesuit*."

"*From your lips?* My dear Mr. Seaton, forgive me! But how could you be so imprudent? Such an admission is utter ruin to our cause. What is to be done *now*?"

"I would seriously advise you to make haste and *skedaddle*."

"What is '*skedaddle*'?"

"I beg your pardon; I have learnt so many Yankeeisms, I forget to whom I use them. Well, then, in plain but inelegant English, make yourself scarce as rapidly as you can."

"Mr. Seaton, you are laying yourself open to the gravest imputations! You are behaving as if you were not a friend, but an enemy!"

"And Rome's enemy I am. I am her most determined foe, for I know her for the mother of abominations, filled

with lies, and drunk with the blood of the saints. If I had doubted this your admissions during our conversation would have proved to me how just is the estimate I have formed of her whom I once called my mother Church."

"Are you, then, a heretic?" cried Newcomb, all aghast, trembling with emotion, and turning deadly pale.

"I am a Protestant Dissenter. You can call me 'heretic' if you choose. From your lips it is rather a compliment than otherwise."

"Good God! And I have shown all my heart to the renegade, the traitor!" muttered Newcomb, terribly disconcerted. "Sir, you have acted a most dishonourable part; you are worthy to be an apostate."

"I have only used a little of your own '*discretion*;' I have not lied to you; I have simply heard your statement, and I have asked a few necessary questions. Think of the great lie that has been daily acted here for more than six years! Think of the falsehoods uttered to the dead and to the living! You forget that I am of Rome's breed! Oh, I was well tutored! I would scorn to turn her own weapons against her, for I will not defile myself with lies, and frauds, and abominable treacheries. Sir, I have only allowed you to *speak first*; I have only treated you to a very mild specimen of the '*diplomacy*' you so zealously advocate. But take comfort! I shall not use against you the information I have thus received further than to lay my own plans so as to circumvent yours. Father Fabian must leave Malham; but he must not, shall not, appear before the tribunal of the Sacred College."

"Father Fabian will do as he is commanded, for you cannot loose him from his oath! Mr. Seaton, I wonder that your sainted father does not rise from his grave to curse you—the pervert, the recreant!"

"I should be very much astonished if he did! Do not trouble yourself to get up a ghost for my benefit, for I am in the habit of shooting ghosts whenever I meet them."

"You are a very dreadful person, Mr. Aubrey Seaton."

"Is that your ultimatum? Very well! I cheerfully acquiesce, and, having mutually explained ourselves, I think I will wish you a good day. I am famishing for the want of some breakfast, though I did have some bread and milk



in the housekeeper's room at Seaton Hall. She informed me that the *ménu* here was excellent. Father Fabian is nominal master so long as he remains, I suppose? I shall at once trespass on his hospitality."

Leaving Mr. Newcomb to his own reflections, Aubrey went in search of Fabian. He found Mrs. Darcy, who had coffee waiting for him, but he did not find his friend.

"Where is he?" asked Aubrey, when he had satisfied his hunger.

"He is safe, Mr. Seaton, at present. I wish I knew whether I might trust you."

"I wish I knew whether I might trust you, Mrs. Darcy."

"That you may. But tell me, is it true that you have turned heretic?"

"As true as truth itself; and though I think Father Fabian is only reaping that which he has sown, I want to serve him—to *save him*! He is, I'm convinced, in imminent danger."

"He is in the extremity of danger. But for a few hours I think I shall baffle his persecutors. Brother Gerard will goad him on to the death, if he can; just now, however, I am more than a match for him."

"But where is he?"

"Safe under lock and key. I gave him a dose in his coffee. When he grew sleepy, I persuaded him to go upstairs; and he was so worn out with actual fatigue, and so stupified by the drug, that he went unresistingly where I wanted him to go. Long ago I found out a secret nook in this old Tower; it just holds a small bed, a chair, and a table. He is fast asleep there, and he will sleep till this time to-morrow. Only he and I know of this place; I am certain Newcomb has no idea of its existence, though he knows of the subterranean dungeon below."

"But you cannot keep Father Fabian there, in this secret room, for any length of time."

"No, and I might be trapped myself. You must aid me. To-morrow you must, on some pretence or other, procure, or appear to procure, an order for his arrest."

## CHAPTER XLV.

## AN ILLEGAL CONSPIRACY.

THAT was a strange Christmas-day ; one of the strangest, if not the very strangest, that Aubrey Seaton had ever known. He went back to the Hall by the way he came, and reached it just as the Seatondalers were coming out of chapel. Presently, over the frozen snow, came Edith Armstrong and Millicent, with the little heiress between them, and he went out to meet them ; he had not seen Edith at all that morning, but he had had a short candle-light conference with Millicent, while she stood shivering in her *robe-de-chambre*, wishing for once that Aubrey were not quite so energetically inclined. He had promised to meet the ladies in the chapel, if possible, in time for the commencement of the service, and of course they had looked for his appearance in vain.

"Why, Aubrey," was Millicent's greeting, "what have you found to keep you at that old Tower ? Have you and Mr. Fabian been holding festival ? Has there been a 'high celebration,' or have you been devouring Christmas fare ?"

"Neither ; though Mrs. Darcy gave me a very good breakfast. But, Millie and Miss Armstrong, I am very ill at ease ; I must have some talk with you : and where are Mr. and Mrs. Clifford ?"

"They are gone home ; we decided to dine quietly alone to-day ; but you are expected at Priests' Croft. Miss Seaton, Beatrice, and I have promised to go across for the evening."

"I should like to speak to you first. I will, if you please, return with you to the Hall ; to talk here is impossible, notwithstanding the sunshine." And then he said to his sister in German, "Send the little one away. It is not well that she should hear what I have to say." So when they reached the house Beatrice was given in

charge to Mrs. Jeliffe, who was very anxious to administer some special dainty to her little mistress, as it still wanted an hour to dinner-time.

"Now, what is it?" asked Millicent, as she threw off her bonnet, and drew up to the large fire in the oak parlour. "I know by your look, Aubrey, that something has gone wrong. Tell us the whole story."

Which Aubrey did, from his first view of the Tower to his parting with Mrs. Darcy. But it was not easy to make Edith comprehend to the full extent the peril in which Fabian was placed. He and Millicent understood the position at a glance; they had not been rocked in the cradle at Rome and reared in her schools for nothing. They knew what things meant; they could read the signs of the times from various small portents; what was written in cipher for unsophisticated Protestants, was in plain text for them. By the light of other days, they could see clearly that which was obscure and unintelligible to the uninitiated. When, however, she did take in the situation, she was as anxious as Aubrey and Millicent that something should be done to deliver Fabian from the snares which encompassed him.

"It seems to me," said Edith, "that the grand difficulty lies with the poor man himself. He has sworn a solemn oath to render unquestioning obedience to certain powers. And since he adventures only his own safety, compromising no other person, I do not see how he can bid these same powers defiance."

"It is not an easy problem to solve. I know myself the terrible burden imposed by these ecclesiastical oaths. To persuade Father Fabian, even if one felt justified in persuading him, would be, I am fully convinced, out of the question. He will go to Rome just as conscientiously as Luther went to Worms, if he is not prevented."

"Might he not clear up matters if he went?"

"No! There is nothing to clear up, nothing to explain. Fabian's only fault was his want of success. I say *was*, for now he is accused of heresy."

"And if he be examined on this point he will be declared guilty," said Edith.

"Most undoubtedly he will, and for two reasons. In

the first place, he is a heretic, as Rome holds heresy, though he clings so faithfully to her communion; and in the second place, there are those who have already pronounced his condemnation, and who will take good care that he does not escape them."

"But what sentence can be imposed upon him? He has done nothing worthy of severe punishment from *them*, at least."

"He has committed against Rome one of the worst sins he could commit. He has, as she imagines, deluded her; he has compromised her, as she declares, through indiscretion; and, above all, he has exposed her policy and her machinations to her enemies. The ground lost here can never be regained—that is to say, not until the present generation has died out; and the people are more stubbornly Protestant than they were before the agitation commenced. Viner tells me there are quite three times as many Methodists in the Fellshire-dales as there were seven years ago."

"That is a good hearing."

"A very good hearing! But it shows which way the current flows, and that is in the opposite direction from Rome. And not only has Rome herself been shamefully defeated in these districts, but Anglicanism has suffered loss, and is regarded with great suspicion. Fabian, the man who was to have carried out to perfection the rough scheme of his Church, has been, to some extent, the cause of this great failure. At any rate, he was the responsible person; the reins were committed to his hands, and he has somehow let them fall. Morally he is not to blame; politically he is a criminal, and as a criminal he will be treated."

"What can they do to him?"

"Anything they please! He will not appeal to Cæsar; he will simply take his trial before an irresponsible ecclesiastical tribunal. When he surrenders himself to his superiors, he gives himself over, bound hand and foot, to his bitter and cruel foes. No one can help him, since he will not help himself."

"If you were summoned before any of Rome's consistories, would you go?"

"Certainly not. Or if I went, constrained by any sense of duty, I would take care to avail myself of the assistance and co-operation of the British police. I would go with the eyes of Christendom upon me; and Rome, thank God! is so far mulcted in her tyrannical despotism, that she cannot and dare not openly outrage the free spirit of the age. But Fabian walks meekly into the very jaws of the lion, who is seeking to devour him. He will go to some monastery, to which he is ordered to repair; there, he will be treated as a prisoner; and by-and-by he will be transferred to some other and more obscure stronghold of the Church. We shall hear, in due time—if we hear anything—that he is deeply contrite, and has confessed his guilt—whatever that is supposed to be; that he has vowed henceforth to live a life of penance, solitude, and lowly obedience; that he has become a saint—after the fashion of convent-saints; and finally, that he has died in the odour of sanctity! And the whole story may be, nay, probably will be, a sheer farrago of lies. All the while he may be pining in some dungeon, or in some miserable cell, if he have not already expiated his blunders with his life. It is impossible to know what goes on within the walls of an Italian monastery; you may witness your own funeral, and know that you are as dead to the world as if six feet of mould really covered you; your friends outside may weep over you, and have masses said for your soul, never dreaming that you are enduring purgatorial miseries on earth!"

"It is only in foreign convents that such atrocities can be perpetrated, I trust?" asked Edith.

"I would fain hope not, though I do not see what is to hinder any kind of injustice or cruelty in any convent. British soil avails very little if the walls are strong, and the portals securely guarded; the free air of England is nothing to one who may not breathe it, though still on English ground. The English people are mad to allow these 'religious-houses' to exist in their midst, self-regulated, self-governed, and—*uninspected*! I would not suppress them altogether, for if there be birds of night which prefer foul cages to the sweet airs of open land and sea, I suppose they may be permitted to indulge their inclinations. But

I would limit the number of these so-called 'religious-houses,' they should be duly registered, and under strict Government inspection. Like gaols, lunatic asylums, workhouses, and other public institutions, convents should be, to a certain extent, under public rule; and those who conduct them should be responsible, not to a stilted hierarchy, but to the *State* itself."

"Are you afraid that Father Fabian may be caught in some strange snare, and spirited away no one knows whither?" asked Millicent.

"His departure may be very abrupt, he may be hurried off before he has any chance of communicating with us. Now that Gerard Newcomb knows all the difficulties and dangers of his own position, now that he finds the true character of the Malham Mission is discovered, he will not let the grass grow under his feet. He and Damiano, and the others in charge there, will decamp very speedily, you may be certain, but they will have the place clear of Fabian before they start. I dare say Newcomb is provided with all sorts of documents in the way of summons and citations. At any moment he may command Fabian, in virtue of his oath, to commence his journey. That is what Mrs. Darcy fears, and therefore she has resorted to the very curious expedient of which I told you."

"Curious, indeed! But is Mrs. Darcy to be trusted?"

"I think so—I hope so! It is, however, obviously impossible that she can keep Fabian where he is for more than a few hours. The cabinet in which he is locked up can only be entered through her own room. She means to have a bad headache, and go to bed presently, that she may act as a kind of body-guard! She says he will not awake from the lethargy occasioned by the drug she has given him till to-morrow morning; and, meanwhile, she trusts that Newcomb and his crew will hunt for their victim in vain."

"You have never seen this secret place?"

"Never! She would have taken me to it, and showed me Fabian asleep, she said, only that it might lead to the betrayal of the nook. And as Damiano and another bilious-looking individual were pottering about, I could perceive that her apprehensions were most just."

"And it may be some time before he is inquired for, may it not?"

"Probably. She would tell Newcomb that Father Fabian was worn out with his long night watch, that he had retired to rest, and was not to be disturbed on any pretence."

"Suppose, in spite of this, they should invade his private rooms, and find them empty?"

"She had provided against that contingency as far as she could, by locking Fabian's door on the outside, and putting the keys in her own pocket. She thought all was pretty safe for to-day; but it will go hard with him and with her, she believes, if she is forced to prolong the conflict, and fight single-handed, *to-morrow*."

"Do not let that be!" said both the girls at once. "Before to-morrow we must arrange some plan to help her."

"Her own scheme seems the most feasible. Fabian must be *arrested*! That will place him under the protection of British law with a vengeance. His enemies will not be able to approach him, nor can he, however willing, obey the summons he has received. Only how is this capture to be effected, and on what grounds? We cannot lay hands on him simply as a Jesuit; he has not obtained money from any one here on false pretences. We are bound to make some distinct charge against him; the English law does not sanction sudden and mysterious apprehensions. Besides, where is there a magistrate who will act in so singular a case?"

"Mr. Clifford is a magistrate," replied Edith, "and so, of course, was dear General Seaton. There is old Colonel Lee at Lunedale, a mile or two on this side of St. Ulpha's, but I very much doubt whether he would act in such a case. There is no other magistrate nearer than Chalfont's."

"Mr. Clifford would answer every purpose if he can be prevailed upon to issue a warrant for the apprehension of the Rev. John Fabian, of Malham Tower. But I am afraid we are engaging in what may be called an *illegal conspiracy*! and we may have to account for our proceedings."

"Never mind that," said Millicent, impatiently; "it will be only a seeming illegality. Father Fabian will know why he is detained in durance vile, and he will no more proceed against us for false imprisonment, than did Luther against his kindly gaoler of the Wartburg. Now, it is quite time you went across to Priests' Croft, and you have to dress. Edith and I will join you in time for an early cup of tea. Beatrice will be with the Clifford children, and we can hold our private conference."

Like one in a dream, Aubrey Seaton crossed the park to the curate's humble dwelling, which he had never entered since the day of his intrusion on Mr. Clifford's domestic privacy. Was the old grey coat still in existence? he wondered. Did the luckless babies continue to fall into the fender? and would there be the same odour of lukewarm pork and greens pervading the small establishment? There was something almost ludicrous in the memories of that day, notwithstanding the solemnities that attended it.

But the mistress of the house was at home to-day, and she had made all requisite arrangements; moreover, the elder children were growing up, and even the child who had so impressed Aubrey by tumbling into the fender was a sturdy urchin now, able to take care of himself and to preserve his equilibrium on all ordinary occasions. He dined at table, and behaved with due decorum, though evidently not at all sorry to be dismissed with Jeannie and Phemie to the nursery, with a good store of apples, oranges, figs, and other modest luxuries.

It was a relief when the children left the room, dragging their eldest sister with them, on the plea that she *always* played with them at certain games on Christmas afternoon, and that they could not do without her! And then, that no time might be lost, Aubrey straightway repeated the strange story of the morning, and begged the curate and his wife to give their counsel and assistance. By the time all had been explained, Edith and Millicent, with little Beatrice, had arrived.

"I am sure I do not know what to say," said Mr. Clifford, uneasily. "I am a magistrate, certainly, though I scarcely ever act; it has been a mere matter of form



always. I was only sworn in for convenience' sake, to save General Seaton trouble, and I never yet did anything independently of him. And this—this is really an *extreme* case! You ask me to issue a warrant for the arrest of Mr. Fabian, and, as I understand, with the kindest intentions. But I really cannot perceive under what pretence it is to be done. English law, you know, provides that a man's offence shall be specified before he is taken prisoner!"

"Charge him with anything you like!" said Millicent. "Charge him with *forgery*! He has certainly forged signatures, at some time or other."

"But who will prosecute?"

"No one; because he is not to be prosecuted. We only turn the tables on his adversaries, and get into the field before them."

"It won't do," replied Mr. Clifford, decisively. "I know as little about law as any one,—spite of my magisterial pretensions,—but I see clearly that this thing cannot be done. Unless some definite and actual charge be preferred against the unfortunate man, it is impossible to arrest him on British ground."

"But it is precisely to detain him on British ground that we ask for the arrest," urged Aubrey.

Mr. Clifford still shook his head. "It is a wild-goose scheme," he continued, "worthy of a convent-bred woman like Mrs. Darcy, trained in all kinds of intrigue and *finesse*. She thinks a little pluck and a 'pious fraud' will accomplish the purpose; she is deceived: it cannot be. What do you say, Emily?"

And he turned confidently to that long-trying friend and counsellor, his faithful wife, who hitherto had listened with the deepest attention, but in unbroken silence. Thus appealed to, she answered, "You are right, my dear. This arrest cannot take place. It would be most inexpedient that we should commit ourselves to so rash and unlawful an undertaking. The whole country would hear of it, the affair would be condemned, and in the end Mr. Fabian would not be served. I advise that this plan of pretended arrest be abandoned: is there no other way of defending this unhappy man whose liberty and whose life are thus imperilled?"

"How would it answer," asked Edith, "if we went, a good party of us, to the Tower, demanding to see Mr. Fabian, whom we might invite to return with us to the Hall? He would be as safe there as in Lunechester gaol, for thither his persecutors would not dare to pursue him. Mrs. Darcy might accompany him, for she would be no match for those to whose tender mercies she was left, after her master's evasion. I do not see why we should not act openly and fearlessly."

"Nor I either!" cried Aubrey. "I suppose Mrs. Darcy has impressed me with the notion, so that I had '*warrant for arrest*' on the brain! With Mrs. Darcy as our ally, I am sure we may succeed."

"It will be a clear case of abduction," said Millicent; "but since the abducted person is to be benefited, and will certainly endorse our proceedings, I think we may conscientiously attempt it. It is an odd thing to do, certainly; but there is no other way of saving poor Father Fabian, I am convinced. And how dreadfully ill he looked yesterday!"

"He looked far worse this morning," returned Aubrey. "My own impression is that he is on the verge of a very serious and perhaps fatal illness. Think well, Miss Armstrong, before you bring him to the Hall; he may be there for weeks—he may *die* there!"

"I am not afraid, if Mrs. Darcy comes with him. I am sure the General would have said 'let him come!' Deceived as he was, our dear friend truly loved that man."

"Had he not better come here?" said Mrs. Clifford, turning to her husband. "If he were under my matronly care, in *our* house, the world could say nothing—and it will say spiteful things, you know, if it has the barest chance! If Edith does not object, we can send some of the children to the Hall, and so make plenty of room."

All saw that this was a wise and prudent arrangement, and it was settled that to Priests' Croft Mr. Fabian should be brought before many hours were over. Mr. and Mrs. Clifford, Aubrey, the two young ladies, and as many servants as might be deemed expedient, were to go over to the Tower early next morning. The ladies would drive, and Fabian would accompany them on the return journey,

in the closed carriage. They would simply request to see Mr. Fabian on immediate and urgent business, and then he must at once be persuaded to join their party.

"It strikes me," said Aubrey, "that he will be in far too weak a condition to resist our wishes or our will. He looked like death this morning, and he will awake bewildered and exhausted from his long, unnatural sleep. Brother Gerard may fume and remonstrate, and Damiano may swear in all the languages he knows, but if Fabian do not himself resist it will not much matter. And once safe with us, Messrs. Newcomb and Co. will know the game is up, and their tactics frustrated for the present."

Before they parted that night they arranged to be at the Tower by nine o'clock next morning.

"And, perhaps, even now he is on the road to London, or in some vessel on the Bay!" said Millicent when she and Edith were alone again at the Hall, Aubrey being the Cliffords' guest.

"That will hardly be the case if Mrs. Darcy is not a traitress," replied Edith.

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## CHAPTER XLVI.

### THE SIEGE OF MALHAM TOWER.

"Foresight may be vain :  
The best laid schemes o' mice and men  
Gang aft a-gley."

BUT it is not always possible to carry out one's arrangements as speedily as might be desired. Snow fell, though not very deeply, in the course of that Christmas night, and when at last the tardy dawn came down upon the solitudes of Seatondale a dense sea fog had arisen, which, advancing inland and meeting the vapours rolling darkly and thickly from the mountain tops, blotted out all the

features of the landscape, turning the cold grey morning twilight into "darkness visible."

Edith and Millicent breakfasted early, and the servants were astir betimes, but whether the intended expedition to Malham Tower would take place or not seemed questionable. The coachman decided that the horses could not go out, they could never pull that heavy carriage through the snow, which had probably drifted on the other side of the hill; and if they could it would be next to a miracle if they kept the road. Nearly an hour later than they had intended the Cliffords and Aubrey walked over from Priests' Croft, and very dismal accounts they brought of the difficulties of the way. They had come but a very short distance, and by a beaten, familiar track; nevertheless, they had strayed more than once from the frequently trodden path, and on one of these occasions both Mr. and Mrs. Clifford had lost their bearings, and had differed respecting the actual points of the compass.

"You see," said Mrs. Clifford, "I thought we were close to the great fir-clump, just where the road makes that fine sweep; but we had really left the trees behind us, and were making the best of our way towards the further side of the park. Luckily I came upon that mound where we planted the rhododendrons last year, and that gave me some notion of our whereabouts. But I declare to you, Edith, I never felt more completely nonplussed in my life, and I only wonder we are here at all."

"We shall have to go to Malham on foot," replied Edith; "I do not think driving would be practicable on such a day. And the fog thickens; it is darker now than it was twenty minutes ago."

"Still, may it not disperse at any moment, or lift sufficiently to show us the necessary landmarks, from time to time?" asked Aubrey. "I have seen dense mountain mists scatter themselves in a moment, before now, on the Alps, on the Pyrenees, and among the Catskill Mountains of the Western World. I could find the way with only a few transitory glimpses, I am sure."

But Edith and the Cliffords shook their heads; they knew from experience that there was little chance of any change of atmosphere before the turning of the tide; and

that would not be till the afternoon. "And then it will be getting dark," observed Millicent; "it will never do to delay so long."

"How do you generally manage in these fogs?" was Aubrey's next inquiry.

"In such a blinding fog as this we manage to stay at home," answered Mr. Clifford. "We do not often have such days, but still they do now and then occur, and as nobody in Seatondale ever has very urgent business it is easy to reconcile ourselves to circumstances, and consider ourselves to be weather-bound. In the present case there is the extremely serious complication of the snow, which hides and disguises all that the fog leaves dimly visible."

"You ladies cannot stir, that is certain," said Aubrey, with some decision. "But might not Mr. Clifford and myself, and some of the men make the attempt? At least, we can try; we are not in the fastnesses of an Alpine pass; I have travelled on worse ground in far worse weather."

"The snow would be nothing without the fog, and the fog might be easily overcome, if we could only see the road just under our eyes. Still, Mr. Seaton, I am quite willing to make the experiment if you are. Which of the men can we take with us?"

The housekeeper and the butler were summoned, and they entered into the scheme with a spirit which promised well for their entire co-operation. "There are three lads I can answer for," said Mr. Viner, after a little consideration; "there's Robert, the first groom; and Jackson, the under footman; and Salkeld, who does odd jobs in the stables; to say nothing of old William Rigg, the gardener; though he's pretty well on in years, he is more active than many a younger man, and he's as plucky as a lad when pluck is needed. He's got stuff in him, Rigg has, though he is a Methody!"

"Oh!" said Aubrey; "are you referring to my old friend, the Methodist gardener who quoted Watts's Hymns to me so long ago? Of course he has stuff in him, plenty of stuff! such good, God-fearing men always have. I owe Mr. Rigg more thanks than I can express, for he was the

person who, by God's grace, let in light on my darkened soul. By all means let us have my Methodist friend ! ”

“ And I do not think Mr. Antony would like to be left out,” put in Mrs. Jeliffe. “ If you should have any difficulty at the Tower, gentlemen, the larger your company the better.”

“ I would go and welcome,” said Mr. Viner, “ but I am that lame with the rheumatics that I can hardly hobble about the house, and I should only be in the way. And now, Mr. Clifford, shall I tell the men to prepare themselves ? If you make up your minds to go, the sooner you start the better.”

The ladies, however, declared that they would not be left behind ; at least they would make the attempt. The men whom Mr. Viner had chosen were quite ready for the enterprise, and they were at once called in to partake of a good solid luncheon before they set off for Malham. But it was past noon ere they left the Hall.

So long as they were in the private grounds, it was not very difficult to keep the way, and through the wood there were plenty of landmarks to prevent them from wandering ; but once on the open heath, they felt themselves like men on unknown seas without a compass. Of course, they all kept close together ; they could not distinguish each other at the distance of a yard. They had wandered for a full hour, and were beginning to fear they had lost themselves on the wild heath, when all in a moment came one of those strange, but not unfrequent liftings of the fog-veil, of which Aubrey Seaton had spoken. A gust of icy wind blew sharply from the shore ; they heard the great waves tumbling upon the rocks far off, and suddenly, as though an unseen hand had torn the dark mists asunder, a line of pale yellow light rushed up from the sea, and they saw before them the faint outline of Malham Tower, standing out against a dark background of impenetrable cloud, that closed in upon the moss, and the lower fells which lay inland, like shades of blackest night.

“ Praise t' Lord ! ” cried the Methodist gardener. “ I thowt we'd win thro' t' mirk, if on'y we trusted in His help. He's scattered t' darkness that was like unto t' shadow o' death itself. Praised be His holy name.”

"Amen!" responded Aubrey. "Five minutes ago the lift would have done us little or no service, for we should not have been within sight of the Tower. Let us press on; the fog may close in upon us again at any moment."

Five minutes more, and they were all standing before the principal door of the Tower, about which there was not the smallest sign of life. "It looks like a dead place," said Millicent, shuddering; "it is just like going up to the Inquisition, and knocking at the portals thereof! Knock louder, Aubrey. It seems to be a case of nobody at home!"

It did indeed. In vain Aubrey thundered at the iron-clamped oaken door, which nothing short of gunpowder or some other explosive could have forced from its hinges. In vain Edith pulled wildly at the bell; long and loud were the peals she produced, but neither ringing nor knocking availed anything. When, at last, they ceased, and looked round at each other, all was utter silence, only the deep low moaning of the distant waters fell upon the ear; the house itself was soundless as a tomb!

"There is no one here!" said Aubrey, despairingly; "the place is deserted! Those villains, Newcomb and Damiano, have been too clever for us. The fog has not hindered *their* departure."

"Try the postern door," said Mr. Clifford; "that is close to the offices. Time back when I visited Mr. Fabian, I more frequently entered that way than any other. Also, you can get in through the chapel, and the monks' chambers, above the cloisters."

"We must try every way," replied Aubrey. "And we are quite justified in forcing an entrance, if no one appears."

"That is easier said than done," remarked Antony. "I have heard the General say many a time that Malham Tower would stand a regular siege."

"Then we must lay siege to it!" was Aubrey's comment, as he pulled at the postern-bell, which clanged till it roused all the echoes of the place. But only the echoes answered; the death-like stillness of the house itself was unbroken as ever. It was something unearthly, ominous, and horrible.

Meanwhile the gardener had espied at the foot of the

knoll several old pieces of timber, by aid of which it would be quite possible to scramble up the wall of the courtyard. Without a word he hauled them to the likeliest spot, and in half a minute was perched astride on the topmost stones, where he was immediately heard to address some unseen person or persons close at hand.

"Come noo, ye fause loon, if ye dinna want to get into sair thurble and punishment of the law, open the door wi' out mair ado."

And then, first Aubrey, and following him the serving men, swarmed up the wall to the vantage point which the gardener had already attained; Mr. Clifford was not sure whether it would be consistent with his clerical character to follow suit, he therefore remained below in attendance on the ladies.

The person to whom Rigg had spoken was one of the Italians whom Aubrey had noticed only yesterday. He looked both insolent and frightened at the sight of so many opponents. He stood in the inner doorway leading to the kitchens, not speaking, but scowling fiercely at the foe. He did not move, and Aubrey commanded him to open the postern door. He shook his head as if he did not understand English, and muttered something that could scarcely be supposed to be of the nature of a polite greeting. Once more, Aubrey repeated the command, and in Italian, but without result, and the man made as if he would retreat into the passage behind him.

There was not a second to lose. Aubrey leaped down at once into the courtyard, drew from his breast-pocket a revolver, and rushed upon the fellow, who was happily unarmed. In half a minute he was in the grasp of the stalwart young Englishman, who addressed him with: "Now, my man, I don't want to hurt you, but I come to see my friend and cousin Mr. Fabian, the master of this house, and see him and speak to him I will before I turn my back on Malham Tower. We have reason to suspect foul play, so we have brought a magistrate with us. Go and open that door and admit him, or it will be the worse for you."

The man hesitated, and glanced first at the pistol, and at the strong hand that held it at half cock, then at the



stalwart forms of the five men who stood around, closing in upon him, with faces whose menace he could read legibly enough. Suddenly he went and opened the door, and Mr. Clifford, who had caught his cue, walked in with all the pomposity he could command, saying in a loud voice, as he crossed the threshold, "In the name of Queen Victoria!" He was very glad now that he had waited without. The grand sentence would have lost half its effect, if he had pronounced it as he scrambled over a six-feet wall.

"*Nel nome della sua Majestà, la Regina del' Inghilterra!*" repeated Aubrey, with a flourish, translating for the Italian's benefit.

"Toom words, I reckon," said Rigg, afterwards; "but they sounded fine an' grand, as if t' Queen and a' her ministers of State was a-waiting to be obeyed."

"Now, then, where is Mr. Fabian? Take me to him," was Aubrey's next demand. In very tolerable English the strange janitor replied that Mr. Fabian had left home several hours ago, accompanied by Mr. Newcomb, Damiano, and two other persons whose names he did not remember. He should think, he could not be sure, but it was his very decided impression, that the Padre Fabiano was summoned on most urgent and important business, and that it might be many months before he returned to Malham Tower.

"Is there one word of truth in the fellow's story?" queried Mr. Clifford. "He would lie for a wager, if I am not terribly mistaken!"

"I, too, have important business," returned Aubrey; "business which may not be deferred. If Mr. Fabian be really absent, I must see Mrs. Darcy. She, at least, remains here, I am sure."

"La Signora D'Arci is indisposed," was the calm rejoinder.

"No matter; I must see her,—lead the way."

"But, indeed, the signor cannot see her! She is in her chamber—in her bed!"

"No matter! these ladies will visit her. Mr. Clifford, will you accompany them? I will wait below with the men."

"The signora does not receive strangers. I may not intrude them upon her. I am only a servant, and I have strict orders."

"In the Queen's name!" said Mr. Clifford once more; while Aubrey fingered his pistol a little suspiciously, keeping his eye sternly fixed on the unlucky Italian, who began to feel that circumstances were quite too strong for him, and that he had better make speedy terms with the enemy. The fact being that Mr. Newcomb had never supposed the possibility of more than one, or at the utmost two persons, invading the fortress which he had left so poorly garrisoned. Ercole—for that was the gentleman's imposing name—had simply received orders to keep fast the doors, to admit no one who came without the password; and if brought to parley, to declare that Father Fabian had left the Tower, and was now well on his way to London. Finding that the intruders were inexorable, Mr. Ercole, with feeble protest, offered to lead the ladies and Mr. Clifford, of whom he evidently stood in awe, to Mrs. Darcy.

Instead, however, of mounting to her chamber, which was on the fourth story, Ercole turned into a short passage close at hand, took a key from his pocket, opened a door, and straightway admitted the visitors. Mrs. Darcy, then, was a prisoner! There she lay, not in bed as her gaoler had affirmed, but on a large, old-fashioned sofa, fully dressed and apparently fast asleep. The entrance of so many people did not rouse her; she breathed regularly but heavily, her hands hung down, her face was very pale, and as Aubrey bent over her he could perceive a faint odour of something like ether. "This is not natural sleep," he said, turning to Edith and Mrs. Clifford. "She has been drugged, she has fallen into the snare, they have fought her with her own weapons. What is to be done?"

Mr. Clifford turned majestically to require an explanation from Signor Ercole, but that worthy had taken advantage of the attention bestowed on Mrs. Darcy to decamp without any ceremony of leave-taking. To pursue him was useless, neither was his presence particularly desired; only, as the ladies said, they might have gained from him some knowledge of the housekeeper's actual state.

"We should ha' gained *lees*!" was the gardener's curt dictum. "Puir soul! she moans and twitches her fingers; she's sair distrest in her dreams, I'll warrant! Let's sprinkle her wi' water!"

With some misgivings, lest any harm should follow from sudden awaking, Rigg's very simple remedy was applied, and with such good result that in a few minutes Mrs. Darcy was sitting upright, breathing naturally, yet like one dazed, trying to recall her scattered senses, or rather her benumbed faculties.

"Am I dreaming?" she said, at length, looking about her as she spoke. "Is that Mrs. Clifford, and is this Miss Armstrong? And surely, surely, sir, you are young Mr. Aubrey Seaton, who was here this morning! Oh, what has happened?"

"That we must ask of you," replied Mrs. Clifford, gently. "We came to take you and Mr. Fabian back with us to Seaton, and we find you thus, and Mr. Fabian—*gone*!"

"Gone! gone! No, he is not gone. Wait a moment, and I shall remember. Were you not in my confidence, sir?" turning to Aubrey. "Do you not recollect?"

"I recollect perfectly, but I do not know the secret of Father Fabian's hiding-place. If you will lead us to him we may at once arrange our departure. You had better, both of you, accompany us. You are not safe here, I am sure. You were locked up, and in the power of that man, when we arrived."

"What man?"

"One of the foreigners whom I saw yesterday; he called himself '*Ercole*.'"

"Ercole! Ah, yes! Was I asleep, Mr. Clifford?"

"So soundly asleep that we had some difficulty in arousing you. Do you know how long you have slept?"

"I have no idea," she replied. "Is it evening or morning? My memory is strangely clouded."

"It is afternoon, and already the twilight deepens," said Aubrey. "But, Mrs. Darcy, it was yesterday, and not to-day, that you and I spoke together."

"Yesterday!" she exclaimed, a sudden look of terror

passing over her countenance. "Oh, my God! what has happened? Yes, I begin to understand! I see it all now! Where is Mr. Newcomb? where is that traitor, Damiano?"

"They are both gone, if Ercole spoke truth, and Father Fabian with them."

"God forbid that he should be with them! He is still safe, I trust. Come with me, Mr. Seaton; we can tell him that his friends await him below."

She arose, walking like a somnambulist, leaning on Aubrey, as they left the room. Mrs. Clifford and Antony followed at a distance, at Edith's suggestion. They could not be at all sure that they had the place to themselves, was her remark. The Italian, certainly, was not to be trusted, and he might even now be lurking somewhere, ready to avenge himself of his defeat.

While they waited, a shriek was heard from above, and all flew up the narrow winding stairway, Rigg and the young men going foremost. When they reached the scene of action, Mrs. Darcy was fainting in Aubrey's arms. A panel of the wall of the room which they had entered was pushed aside, showing a small lighted closet within—the secret cell of which Mrs. Darcy had spoken to Aubrey the day before. But the retreat was empty; the bird had flown! The narrow bed showed that it had been recently occupied; an empty wine-glass and some crumbs of bread were on the deep window-ledge. Fabian's hiding-place then had been discovered, and he was *gone!*" Whither? Had he voluntarily left his tower of safety, or was he at that moment a helpless captive in the power of his most bitter and relentless enemies?

## CHAPTER XLVII.

## ATHANASIA'S STORY.

THEY all looked at each other in blank dismay. Mrs. Clifford and Millicent busied themselves with the unconscious Athanasia; but Mr. Clifford, Aubrey, and Edith, turned at once to the consideration of the next steps which should be taken.

"In the multitude of counsellors there is safety," said one of old time. In this case, however, no one had anything to counsel, and a general feeling of hopelessness stole over the little party in the Tower. Even Mr. Antony, who prided himself on being eminently a man of resources, had nothing available to propose; he could only shake his head, and say rather irrelevantly, "Oh, Mr. Seaton, sir, if only my honoured master could have lived to see this day! I cannot see what is to be done, can you?"

"The first thing to be done is, certainly, to go home to Seaton Hall," said Edith, quietly. "We can do nothing and devise nothing in this place, which is getting quite too cold for human endurance. We may be pretty certain that Mr. Fabian will not return here; nor can we pretend to follow him till we have some clue to the direction which he has been compelled to take. He may be, or he may not be, *en route* for Rome; but Rome is a good way from Fellshire, and speedy travelling is impossible in the present state of the weather. Depend upon it, Mr. Fabian is not very far from us. See, Mrs. Darcy is recovering; do let us make haste home before anything happens to keep us here all night."

"You are quite right, Edith," returned Mr. Clifford, drawing up the collar of his coat, and shivering. "The place is as cold as the grave, and there does not seem to be *any* fire from the battlements to the basement; let us get away as fast as possible. At Seaton there are men, and horses, and carriages, to say nothing of warmth and

food ; here there is nothing, and we can do nothing except injure our health, which will scarcely benefit the unfortunate man we seek to serve. What do you say, Mr. Seaton ? ”

“ I say that Miss Armstrong is the most sensible person among us. Nothing—except harm—can possibly be gained by our lingering here. We can lock up the place, I suppose ? ”

“ Mrs. Darcy can, doubtless. And she is almost herself again.”

Yes ; Athanasia was herself again ! And that is equivalent to saying that she was in her own person a host. She had fainted—almost for the first time in her life—and unlike many silly fine ladies, who imagine fainting to be highly interesting, she regarded the performance with no little self-scorn and disgust. “ To think I should be such a fool ! ” she cried, loftily rejecting Millicent Seaton’s *viniagrette* ; “ going off in a swoon just when I wanted all my senses about me ! I shall be having hysterics next, if I don’t take care. I beg everybody’s pardon for giving so much unnecessary trouble ; I can only plead as an excuse that I was not myself after the opiate, and that the shock was great. Besides, one is not quite so strong at sixty as in one’s prime—we must all grow old.”

To her they all involuntarily turned as to a leader.

“ Yes,” she replied, when several of the party had spoken, “ let us all make haste to get away. I shall never feel my senses clear till I have my mother-earth under my feet and the open sky above me ; and we don’t serve John Fabian by delaying. And see, the fog has gone ! ”

And so it had ! With the natural perversity of fogs, whether brumous or otherwise, it had abruptly taken itself off, literally on the wings of the wind, which was blowing freshly from the north. Aubrey looked out, and lo ! though it was past sunset, the world was brighter and clearer than it had been for the last four-and-twenty hours. The mountains were still shadowy and dim, but the rocky heath was free from mist ; the distant sea rolled darkly on a cloudless horizon, the snow-laden pines waved like funeral plumes across the solitary moorland ;

there was a pale rose gleam on the Estuary-fells, and overhead a few faint stars were visible. There would be no difficulty in finding the way back to Seatondale. Everybody was more than willing to hasten thither as fast as possible. But ere any movement was made, Mrs. Darcy asserted herself. She was still weak and trembling, but she was not the one to yield to what she stigmatised as "mere womanish sensations." She had drawn herself up, and shaken herself, and finally plunged her head into a basin of ice-cold water; then she led the way downstairs into the kitchen, where she thought it most likely that some remnants of a fire might still be mouldering—and where, in fact, she found a mass of white peat embers—to the inexperienced eye looking quite dead and cold, but having, as she well knew, life and heat within them. A judicious application of the poker, two or three lucifer-matches, and behold, there was a cheering blaze!

"There," said Mrs. Darcy, as she contemplated the bright result of her *coup de main*; "now you don't stir till you have eaten and drunken, both. Unless there has been a general foray there is plenty in the larder. An empty cupboard and an empty stomach are always to be avoided. Time flies? I know it does; but half an hour cannot matter now, and we shall get to Seatondale all the quicker for having broken our fast. No! it will not be any darker for the next two hours, for there is a young moon to light us on our way; she will be well above the horizon till past eight o'clock. I am going to make you ladies some coffee, and there is good wine for the gentlemen. As for you, my men"—turning to the five servants—"you shall have a real Christmas-pie, and some old October to wash it down, only you must be quick about it, and dispense with ceremony."

In less time than it would have taken many people to think about it, the most delicious coffee was ready. Mr. Clifford and Aubrey had uncorked a bottle of special Madeira, and the men were cutting down the wonderful Christmas-pasty, which had escaped the ravages of the Italians, who seemed to have confined their notice chiefly to the macaroni, of which not a shred remained, and to a particularly sour claret that Athanasia had put aside for

vinegar. She herself was the only person who made no repast.

"I cannot; do not press me!" she returned, when urged by Edith and Emily to partake of coffee and biscuits. "The stuff I have had has made me feel deadly sick—they rather overdid it, I fancy; if you had not come, I should have slept and slept my senses away, and awoke with about the strength and the intelligence of a month-old infant. No, not any wine, thank you, Mr. Seaton. Do not think of me; I shall be all right in a few hours. I am going down to milk the cow and feed the chickens. The poor animals need not suffer, anyway; and the cow—she is a splendid Alderney—will spoil if we leave her till to-morrow. I wonder whether anybody had the sense to milk her this morning? She would come and low, poor cushie, under the windows, if no one attended to her."

And in an instant she was off, followed, however, by Rigg, who said he would milk the cush while Mrs. Darcy fed the chuckies and shut up the out-houses. Though she tottered as she walked, she rejected the arm which Aubrey would have offered her, and with a vigour and promptness truly amazing, went from place to place, performing such small duties as the emergency required. "Now then," she said at last, "all is safe without, and the dumb creatures are well cared for. I know where there is a goodly sum of money—I will carry that with me, I think. As to the valuables generally, they will be safe enough, till we can take proper and legal measures. We must see, though, that the chapel is closed, Mr. Seaton."

"Certainly. Can I manage the locks and bolts?"

"I am afraid not; you would bungle and lose precious time; but you may accompany me if you please. There is the altar-plate—it must be left where it is, I suppose. No one will ever think of stealing it, unless it be Mr. Newcomb—and he must do as he thinks best."

In a few minutes the chapel and the cloister were secured; the lamp before the so-called altar was flickering in the socket, but Mrs. Darcy did not see fit to feed the dying flame. On the contrary, she puffed out the feeble spark, and with a shrug of her shoulders, looking towards the sacramental table, said, curtly, "What fools these



High Church folk are, bowing down to an imaginary *Host*! We Catholics—right or wrong—kneel to something tangible, at least; they to absolutely *nothing*, to a mere locality, to a mawkish sentiment. If they did but know how Rome despises them, and uses them for her own purposes, the idiots! You were quite right, Mr. Aubrey, to turn Dissenter. If I quit the communion of Rome—and I am getting terribly out of conceit with her, in my old age—I shall not cast in my lot with the Anglicans, nor with any sort of State religionists. I have not made up my mind whether I will be a Primitive Methodist or a Quaker. I rather incline to the thee and thou people. Come along!”

All was made fast, the peat fire finally extinguished, and a few papers and pocket-book, and other articles stowed away in Mrs. Darcy's capacious leather bag, which she always carried with her when she went abroad, and the besiegers were ready to depart. The serving men were already outside the Tower, and the rest of the party was gathered together in the small court where Aubrey had parleyed with the Italian, when Edith, who was looking over the low wall on the garden side, which commanded the slope immediately beneath the peel and the half-cultivated moss beyond, exclaimed, “There is a carriage coming through the snow, and I believe it is our own carriage from the Hall. Look, Miss Seaton, do you not see that dark moving object, a little beyond that long spur of brushwood? I am sure it is the carriage.”

A very few minutes convinced all present that Edith was not mistaken. Mr. Viner had ordered out the horses as soon as the fog commenced to disperse, and the coachman, who had begun to feel very curious as to what might be transacting at Malham, made no further objections, though far from assured in his own mind that he would not be stopped by some deep drift, or checked at the causeway, which, covered by the snow, would scarcely be distinguishable from the dangerous morass itself. But, happily, there were no drifts of any consequence, though in some places the poor horses had to labour hard to drag the cumbrous old vehicle through a depth of snow that would have utterly disheartened and deterred a London Jehu;

and the causeway was plain enough from certain landmarks, which showed where the moss-lands began. By slow and painful degrees, the carriage came nearer, and then they all, except the men, set out to meet it. Antony, Rigg, and the lads returned by the way they came, as it was incomparably the shorter route; the ladies and Mr. Clifford squeezed themselves into the capacious old-fashioned "coach," as the General had called it to his dying day; and Aubrey, who, like Kingsley, rather enjoyed a "north-easter," mounted to the box-seat. Though Mr. William shook his head more than once, when his fat, sleek beasts had to pull hard, declaring that it was cruelty to animals, only he didn't see how it could be helped!

"They shall have a mash after this," he said confidently to Aubrey, to whom he had taken a great fancy on the occasion of his first visit years before. "And I'll see them well rubbed down and bedded myself, and I dare say they won't be *much* the worse. But, you see, they went to Chalfonts and back the day before yesterday, and they've been used to take it easy so long, that they don't know what work is, and ain't up to so much as they should be. And where may Mr. Fabian be, sir?"

Aubrey briefly narrated what had occurred.

"Well, I never! No, I never!" cried the astonished coachman. "And so they've spirited him off, poor gentleman? Well! I don't know if he don't deserve it, for his own crooked ways, coming here under a false *carackter*. Can't he be punished, Mr. Seaton, for wearing the cloth, when he hadn't no more right to it than I have?"

"I am not sure, but I believe the English Church recognises Romish Orders, though Dissenting ordinations go for nothing. If a Dissenting parson were to pretend to be a veritable cleric, he would get into trouble, I fancy; but a Romanist, unless he got money out of people through the cheat, might go scot free. Anyhow, Mr. Fabian has been punished enough; I think he has felt for a long while that his false life was a burden and a pain. But you see it is easier to get on a wrong track than to turn and go right again!"

"Sure it is, sir; sure it is! And then, I've always heard as the Jesuits was fast banded together, and that if

one of them, pricked by conscience, or disgusted with his own meanness, kicked over the traces, he was sure to be persecuted to the death."

"That I am afraid is too true. And it is that which makes me so anxious for my poor cousin, for he is at this moment in the hands of men who wield a strange and irresistible power, and who would reconcile even murder to their consciences if their Church demanded the sacrifice of a human life."

"Can't we go after the fellows, sir? Sure in England this sort of thing didn't ought to be allowed."

"No! it *didn't ought*," replied Aubrey, in his warmth, regardless of his grammar; "and if Mr. Fabian is not unearthed by this time to-morrow, or very speedily, all England shall ring with the news of his abduction. The Britisher and the Yankee won't stand this sort of thing, thank God! How many saddle horses have you at this moment in the stable?"

"Only one that a gentleman could ride! You see, sir, the General gave up horse-exercise when he first felt himself failing, and we have had so few visitors since the mistress died, that a stud was of no use in the world, except to make work, and eat its head off, in the stalls. But there is our little lady's white pony, and Miss Armstrong's bay mare. How many animals do you want?"

"Well! I suppose one will serve my own turn. Which is the best one to go—Miss Armstrong's bay mare, or the hack you spoke of?"

"Well! if I was you, sir, I'd take the hack. The mare might turn skittish as soon as she felt a stranger's hand on her bridle. She's as meek as a lamb with her mistress on her back, but she do throw other folks sometimes, or else she won't stir a step. I recommend the hack; and when will you want him, sir?"

"This evening, directly we reach the Hall! I must ride to Chalfonts at once, and see Mr. Redmayne, and that Mr. Musgrave they talk of; also the master of Canonbury Holt, who, Mr. Clifford tells me, has lately returned from his long continental wanderings. The country must be roused, and the police of the district, such as they are, set to work.

We cannot do much single-handed ; moreover, we shall be justly blamed if we keep this singular event quiet among ourselves an hour longer than we are compelled to. But I should wish to take at least one of the men with me, for it may be expedient to send several ways at once. When I have seen the gentlemen I mentioned they will not let the grass grow under their feet, I am persuaded."

"As for that, Mr. Seaton, any of the men will go over with you, and there are several heavy horses that will serve their turn standing idle. Now we are safe off the mosses, and on to the main road again, and the snow don't lie so thick but that we may get on a bit faster. It's a long way round by carriage road, you see, sir ; what with mosses and big rocks, and fells poking themselves in the way, and little inlets in the sea, and the like, most of our roads hereabouts are as crooked as any in the kingdom. Yes, sir ; that's our village—those lights you see yonder. We haven't far to go. We shall be at the Croft Lodge in five minutes ; we've done it handsomely *con-sidering*."

When they had reached the Hall, where the men-servants, who had helped to raise the siege, had arrived before them, and told their tale, a council of war was called immediately, Mr. Viner and Mrs. Jeliffe being also of the company. Aubrey at once communicated his intention of riding straightway to Chalfonts. That seemed to him the only step which could be taken that night, and as for passing in inaction the long hours which must elapse before to-morrow morning, it was not for a moment to be thought of. It was now twenty minutes to six ; they had been exactly an hour and a half driving from Malham Tower.

Mrs. Darcy was very pale, and it was easy to see that she was painfully agitated ; but she sat rigidly upright in the easy chair in which Edith had placed her, as if the merest semblance of succumbing to exhausted nature were impossible. Her eyes flashed, and her hands were tightly clasped upon her knees, as she listened intently to the suggestions of Aubrey and the rest. At length she said, "I am convinced that Fabian is still within a *very* few miles. The roads in places must be well-nigh impassable,

and the fog must have bothered them as it did you! I wish I knew when they set out!"

"When did you see Mr. Fabian last?"

"At eight o'clock last night, or perhaps rather later. Now that my mind has cleared I can remember all that happened up till about nine o'clock. After Mr. Seaton left us yesterday Damiano came inquiring for Mr. Fabian, with whom Mr. Newcomb still wished to converse. I told him that Mr. Fabian, worn out and ill with fatigue and harass and watching, had taken, at my advice, a composing draught, and gone to bed. I added that all his doors were locked, and that he could not, under any circumstances, be disturbed, and that Mr. Newcomb must wait until the morrow. He went away to report my answer to the man who now assumed—and I must say he brought all proper credentials—to be our master. Half an hour elapsed, and I was beginning to hope that my stratagem had succeeded, when Mr. Newcomb himself walked into my private sitting-room, and haughtily demanded what I meant by not conveying his message to Mr. Fabian. In a stolid, obstinate sort of way, which was partly natural and partly put on, I repeated my statement, adding, 'If you don't leave Father Fabian alone to have his sleep out, Mr. Newcomb, you are a greater ass than I take you for! He is dead beat; he *cannot* enter into any kind of business till he has rested. You heard him say he would obey orders, and he will keep his word. But if you go and worry him now, till he has had his sleep out, I won't answer for consequences. You'll have him in a raging fever, and you best know if his being in such a state would serve your purpose. Leave him alone till to-morrow morning, and then if you *must* worry and torment the life out of him—why, you must! On your own head be the consequences! And let me remind you that you are in England and in a Protestant country! Just go one half inch too far!—just let John Bull feel the Jesuit's touch on the tip of his little finger!—and you will see what you will see, Mr. Gerard Newcomb! and find yourself in a far worse scrape than poor Father Fabian's at this present time!'

"Well, though he was much displeased at my plain speaking, I could see that it told upon him. Though he

has not been much in his own country, still he knows all about 'the liberty of the subject' and that sort of thing; and he had heard the saying that in England 'every man's house is his castle.' He objected, however, that the Tower was no longer Fabian's own house, the ecclesiastical powers to whom he was responsible having ordered his deposition. 'That does not matter,' I replied; 'he is legally master still, for his name is on the rate-books and on the voting list as *tenant of Malham Tower*. You may see his name on the chapel-doors at Seaton if you like. He paid the Queen's taxes not a week ago, and all documents between him and the General are signed *John Fabian*. Legally, I say, this house is his castle as a British subject, and you had better take care how you harry him out of it sooner than he chooses to go of his own will.' Nothing more passed between us, and I did not see Mr. Newcomb again. The day wore on; part of it I spent in my bedroom lying on my bed; but I was afraid to keep there too long lest I should attract suspicion to the very place I wished them to avoid. At eight o'clock I looked in on my charge, and he was soundly asleep. I put bread and wine lest he should awake and be faint. Then I came down and ate my supper. I took coffee that I might be wakeful. I generally take whisky and water at night; but I would not touch it lest I should be drowsy, and I felt that I must have all my wits about me if I was to cope with Newcomb, Damiano, and the others. I drank my coffee and ate some cold roast beef with horse-radish sauce, and then I sat before the fire thinking I would go up to bed when I had seen to the doors, as my custom was. *I remember nothing more* till I woke up and saw Mrs. Clifford and Miss Armstrong standing over me. The rest you know."

"You thought Newcomb was not aware of 'the secret cabinet'?"

"I quite thought he was not; perhaps it was Damiano who knew of it. Mr. Seaton, it has just struck me somebody must go to St. Ulpha's. It is 'borne in upon my mind,' as the Quakers say, that he is taken to the Dominican convent there, and they will convey him from thence to Garrow, where there is a natural harbour into which

ships of considerable burden can enter. Once embarked, he will not touch dry land again till he reaches Civita Vecchia. Oh, why did I not think of this before? Every moment of delay is so much time lost to us and gained to them—the wretches! Go you to St. Ulpha's, Mr. Seaton; but take men with you who know the country and the town itself. Some one else must carry the news to Chalfonts."

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## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### FOUND!

Now, no one present knew that there existed such a thing as a Dominican Convent at Ulpha's. There was a large, dreary stone house, certainly, in the outskirts of that dull little town, and in it lived old Father Sullivan and several younger priests, who assisted at the altar generally, and served in the different small chapels, which were scattered up and down the country at considerable distances from each other. It was said, too, that foreign ecclesiastics were often Father Sullivan's visitors, and that they came over in queer little ships, which sailed quietly into the then unknown and unutilised port of Garrow, which has a natural harbour of its own in which a fleet of merchantmen might ride securely. If there were any definite suspicions attaching to the dark, sombre house, with its tiers of narrow, curtainless windows, and its high, moss-grown roof, to the olive-complexioned foreigners, and to the mysterious craft that sometimes anchored in lonely Garrow Basin, they took the shape of possible contraband undertakings, carried on under the shelter of Father Sullivan's respected name.

If Mrs. Darcy had spoken of the smugglers at St. Ulpha's the servants at the Hall would have at once caught

the idea; but when she came to refer to a Dominican Convent they were incredulous, and began to think she had taken leave of her senses. Even Mr. Clifford said, wonderingly, "But, my dear lady, there is no Dominican Convent at St. Ulpha's."

"Yes, there is! Father Sullivan's house is the convent, and Dominicans come and go there continually. Don't let us lose any more time in talking about it. Mr. Seaton, I beg you will set out immediately."

Now Aubrey remembered to have heard this St. Ulpha's Station spoken of as a place of secret importance, and he knew, or at least suspected, that through the agency of Father Sullivan and his associates Church despatches were generally forwarded to Malham Tower. Such important documents were seldom entrusted to the common post-office, and accredited couriers, under all sorts of disguises, travelled continually between England and the Continent. Of course it was not likely that simple Protestants should be cognisant of these facts; but Aubrey, bred as he had been in the strongholds of Rome, and tutored in her policy, perfectly comprehended the character of this unknown Dominican Convent lying so snugly under the shadow of the silent Rockshire fells. He prepared at once to comply with Athanasia's request.

In a few minutes all were ready; a party of five rode with Aubrey; Mr. Antony undertook to go over to Chalfont, and several others were presently to mount and explore the bye-roads as far as practicable.

For awhile, Mrs. Darcy seemed almost contented. She sat by the fire and warmed herself; she took food with apparent relish, and finally she asked to be taken upstairs, that she might make herself "a little tidy," having merely huddled on her clothes anyhow before leaving Malham. Edith, of course, accompanied her, taking her to her own chamber and bringing for her use all necessaries of the toilet.

But Athanasia seemed little inclined to avail herself of these. She washed her hands, indeed, musing dreamily as she did so, and she achieved a very remarkable *coiffure*, which was more to be esteemed for its speedy performance than for the effect produced. Then she turned to Edith:



"Miss Armstrong, don't, if you can help it, think me quite demented; but this inaction is more than I can bear! And something calls me—I know not whither! Only, I *must* go out and look for Fabian."

"Look *where*? Indeed, dear Mrs. Darcy, you will only exhaust your own strength, and possibly get lost, and have to be sought for yourself."

"My strength won't fail, as long as I can put it to any use. I am tougher than anybody knows! Yes, I fainted—I can't deny it; but I was weakened by the opiate, and I felt stunned when I found that I had schemed in vain. I am all right now; I could walk to Lunchester if need were, but I shall go stark mad if I sit looking into the fire, or if I go to bed, as they kindly proposed downstairs. Now, Miss Armstrong, I want you to let me out by one of the side doors, and say nothing to anybody till I am clear gone."

"I dare not incur the responsibility! On such a night as this, and tired as you must be! You could only wander about aimlessly, and be found to-morrow morning in the snow—perhaps dead!"

"I shall not wander. I know those woods and heaths, and those lone-paths leading to the shore, as well as you know this warm, lighted chamber! Bless you, child, I have walked to St. Ulpha's, to the convent, with private papers, and to fetch secret despatches, many and many a time, between dark and dawn! And the night! It is splendid! All the fog is gone, and the stars are sparkling like diamonds. Yes, it is cold, but that is agreeable when one has a fever in one's blood. Miss Armstrong, I tell you plainly, *I will go*! Listen! *he* is in the snow—somewhere. I saw him not five minutes ago; *he* will die before morning if I do not go to his succour."

She spoke with so much strange passion, and there was such dreary determination on her pale set features, that Edith felt she might as well resist the advancing tide as strive against this indomitable will. Mrs. Darcy commenced robing herself for her nocturnal expedition. She threw down her bonnet with disgust. "I hate bonnets! they don't keep the cold out, and they are insufferable on a dark night. Lend me a shawl, please, a soft, warm shawl,

not too large, that I can tie over my head. Accursed be the woman who invented bonnets! There, now I shall not get face-ache, and I can see my way before me. Why don't sensible females go back to *hoods*? One more favour I have to beg,—I must take some stimulant with me. There is a pocket flask somewhere, I suppose?"

"There are several about, but I must ask Mrs. Jeliffe;" and before Athanasia could interfere Edith was off to the housekeeper's room, not sorry to engage a confederate in what seemed to her so insane an undertaking. To her surprise, however, Mrs. Jeliffe was quite inclined to aid and abet Mrs. Darcy. She believed in mysterious impulses and supernatural instincts, as do most people of a certain class, living on what are still called the Borders, meaning the once debateable land and its surroundings, north and south, between England and Scotland. "Besides," she whispered, "I have heard many say that Mrs. Darcy has the look of one who has *second sight*! and if she has seen Father Fabian, as she says, with the eyes of her spiritual nature, you may depend upon it she has seen him! And go to him she will, and we can't hinder her any more than the wind. What is it she wants?"

Edith mentioned the flask; and Mrs. Jeliffe at once produced one, which she handed to Mr. Viner to fill with brandy and water.

"Two-thirds of brandy and one of water!" said Mrs. Jeliffe, watching him. "Those who are found in the snow want what other folks don't. Some say no water, but I think a little must be best. I wonder how the monks of St. Bernard mix it for the baskets they hang round the necks of those dear, blessed Christian dogs! And I'll just cut two or three sandwiches—nice thin beef sandwiches, Miss Armstrong; for though I don't by no means hold with the teetotallers, I haven't unlimited faith in alcohol. Anyway, if brandy is the first thing in such a case, beef must be the second and the third! And where I send brandy I always send beef, if possible: I believe in beef, I do!"

"So do I," said Edith; "I am glad you thought of the beef-sandwiches. Why, here is Mrs. Darcy!"

Yes; she had silently followed Edith, to listen whether

she would betray her, in which case she would find some way of getting out of the house, unaided, and without the refreshments which she wished to carry: for to go herself, in person, to the rescue she was fully resolved. And when Athanasia once told herself she was "*resolved*," nothing short of an avalanche or an earthquake could turn her back from the course on which she had determined. Convent-bred women can scarcely be squeamish, therefore a little eaves-dropping came as a matter of course to Athanasia, and she was greatly relieved when she found Mrs. Jelffe taking sides with her. She received the brandy and water with mute thanks, and nodded acquiescence when the housekeeper expatiated on the virtues of cold roast beef and good home-made wheaten bread.

Another minute, and Athanasia was out beneath the starlight, and Edith, with a troubled mind, went upstairs again, feeling quite unequal to facing the Cliffords and Millicent in the drawing-room. Beatrice was safe at Priests' Croft, under Agnes's care: that was one comfort. Strange that a child's frail life should have brought about all this surprising complication of events, the issue of which was likely enough to end in gravest tragedy. She felt as if the events of the last few days, and especially of the last few hours, were not real: she herself, and those about her, and the missing Jesuit Father, seemed more like the shadowy *dramatis personæ* of an exciting tale than actual living people!

But our chief concern at present is with Mrs. Darcy. Once beneath the starlight, with the crisp snow under her feet, and the fresh, keen night wind sweeping up from the distant estuary, she felt all her energies revive, and knew that she was equal to the emergency. She took the broad beaten path across the park, and passed swiftly through the fir-copse, through which lay the road to the wild heath-lands beyond. She might have been going to keep a tryst at some appointed well-known spot, so quickly, so steadily she advanced upon her way. But once beyond the sheltered park enclosure, with the billowy moors stretching whitely for miles around her, and traversed by innumerable paths, she felt her courage fail.

There she stood, a solitary watcher, under the keen stars!

A large red crescent moon was sinking on the western horizon, casting a ruddy reflection on the deep sea-water, where far off it rippled about St. Ulpha's Head. That, and the position of the Great-Bear-Pointers, told her that it was nearly eight o'clock ; no ancient mariner knew the stars and their courses better than this mysterious elderly woman. But there she stood, knowing not which turn to take. Southward she looked across the melancholy sea, and fancied, in the dim light of the setting moon, she could see the Italian barque she knew so well fitting across the waves. *Northward !* and there burned the large solitary light which warned seamen from the treacherous rocks of the St. Ulpha's Promontory. Inland, she heard the low sighing of the mountain winds in many a distant fastness. It sounded to her like an articulate wail, as mournfully it swelled and died in solemn, dirge-like tones. Behind her, though unseen, was the ancient Tower where she had spent six years of such peace and rest as she had never known before. Strange as her life at Malham had been, it had not lacked an element of pure happiness. And happiness had developed her better nature ; happiness had made her a better woman, and shown her how strong were the womanly cravings and the motherly instincts of a heart which she had long believed empty of all earthly passions save ambition and revenge. Poor Athanasia ! what might she not have been, had not the chains and spells of Rome been around her from her earliest years ! And yet she was only one of the countless thousands of victims, whom Rome, by her unnatural repression of the purest and holiest emotions of the human breast, and her cruel tyranny, which binds the soul and fetters the mind, offers as a perpetual sacrifice of sweet savour upon her altars.

"What shall I do ?" sighed Athanasia, as she gazed around her in her deep despair. "I thought if once I could stand here, with the open country before me and the free heaven above my head, I should *know* the road I ought to go. And oh, the searching cold ! That girl was right ; if I loiter here too long I shall be found dead in the snow to-morrow morning." She wandered on a little, scarcely heeding where. A sudden stumble, and a slip into a snow-drift at least two feet deep, roused her from her reverie :



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"What's the use of that?" sighed Athanasia, as she gazed  
and despair. "What right if once I could  
open could I see me and the free  
I should have found the road I ought to  
aching girl was right; if  
I should have found in the snow to-  
She had a little, scarcely  
and a slip into a snow-  
er from her reverie

it was of no use going on in this foolish, aimless way; she must choose her path and keep it. All at once came into her mind the words of Newman's beautiful hymn—"Lead, kindly Light." And the words seemed whispered in her ear—

"I loved to see and choose my path, but now  
Lead Thou me on."

Yes, "the encircling gloom" was, indeed, about her way; the night was dark with fears, and doubts, and dread. All her heart went up in one deep anguished cry, "Lord, my God, lead Thou me on! Guide me whither *Thou* wilt! Oh, I am a poor creature—a weak, foolish, helpless woman; and I have been so proud, so rebellious, so self-willed!—yet, yet for Thy Son's sake, for Thy mercy's sake, remember not past years, but help me and help *him*, I beseech Thee! Let him not fall into the snares of the enemy—the cruel enemy, who, in Thy holy name, will compass his destruction. Lord, Thou knowest they have no heart of pity, no bowels of compassion. They are women-born, and yet cruel as the brood of the pantheress! But *Thou* canst deliver! Thou art mightier than they! Now, give their prey into my hand, I beseech Thee, good Lord!"

While she prayed, lost in the intensity of supplication, the moon had set, and only starlight and snowlight gleamed coldly upon the desolate wild moor.

But a path, which hitherto she had not noticed, she saw now, and knew precisely where she stood. That path was sheltered and safe. It led through a wood of dwarfed sea-blown larches right to the head of the smaller estuary, which must be crossed in order to gain the nearer road to St. Ulpha's. As she had told Edith, she had gone that way often, and she knew it from the point where now she stood to that other point three miles distant, when it broke off abruptly on a piece of furzy moor, which looked straight down upon the grey little town in which just now all her interests were concentrated.

With a murmur of thanksgiving on her lips and fresh hope in her heart, she groped along the wall till she came to the well-known gate which admitted to the coppice. How dark it seemed as she turned away from the open

heath! But what mattered that? She had committed herself to the care of One to whom the darkness is even as the light. He would *lead her on*. Somehow, she felt as if she had God's word for it that she should not fail in that which she had undertaken. By-and-by, the wood seemed lighter, the trees were thinner, and she approached the coast, which ran up there a long way into the land. She would have to descend to the sea-level; to cross the western estuary by the curious bridgeway or causeway, which saved a circuit of at least four miles; then to ascend on the other side, make her way through another wood, and, finally, take one of several easy routes which led directly into St. Ulpha's.

She pressed on with renewed hope and vigour. What energy does the prospect of speedy success lend to failing heart and limbs! Another hour, or perhaps a little longer, and she would have reached the goal—the Dominican Convent, known only to “the faithful.” And what then? Would she obtain admittance? On gaining that privilege, what could she do within its gloomy walls, single-handed and alone? Full well she knew that to appeal to the pity of the men whom she must encounter there would be as vain as to implore the rising waves at half-tide to come no further. “Never mind! God who guides me there will tell me what I am to do!” said Athanasia, grasping, from sheer habit, the crucifix which she wore, and which Baby Beatrice had brought to light so long ago, when the success and triumph of the Malham Mission was her dearest aim, and seemed certainly within the grasp of those to whom it was committed.

But Mrs. Darcy was not to see St. Ulpha's nor the Dominican Convent that night. She was leaving the wood for the open ground, which sloped gradually to the shore, when some sound, which was not the rustle of boughs, or the whirr-r of startled birds, or the murmur of the waves, now distinctly audible upon the beach below, fell upon her ear. She stood still and listened. Yes, that was a human voice!—a moan! There was some human creature near, and in dire extremity. With beating heart, and painfully quickened senses, she again listened breathlessly. Again



the moan, the cry, and surely, *surely* it sounded not unfamiliar. Could he for whom she sought be close at hand?

Following the direction of the sound, she glided in among the trees, forcing her way through brake and bramble till she came to the darkest and thickest portion of the wood. So dark was it that for several moments she could perceive no object, though the moans, which were growing fainter, were close at hand.

At length she touched a death-cold face, and passing her hand over it, she knew it to be Fabian's.

She had found him; but how was she to help him further? He had escaped his persecutors—*how*, she could not guess! even now they might be on his track, and not far distant!

"Fabian! Fabian!" she whispered, crouching down beside him; "take courage; rouse yourself! It is I—Athanasia! Try to get up and come home with me to Seaton Hall, where there are kind hearts waiting to welcome you."

"Athanasia! Seaton Hall!" he murmured dreamily. But her voice seemed to dispel the torpor which had benumbed his faculties. He stretched out his hand. "Is it indeed you, Athanasia? or has God sent an angel to my relief?"

"No angel. Only your friend and mother in affection—only Athanasia. Can you walk?"

"I could not stand," he replied. "I escaped from my captors several hours ago; I knew the bye-ways of the convent—they forgot that. I wandered here on and on, till I sank down from utter weariness. I have not broken my fast since early morning. Athanasia, the world seems stealing from me. Am I dying?"

"Certainly not. Drink this brandy and water. Nay! but you must swallow it. Sip a little at a time. There! does it not revive you? Thank God that I brought it. You are better already. Now you must eat, if it be only two mouthfuls. And in the strength of that meat and drink, please God, you shall go to Seaton Hall."

It was really only two or three mouthfuls that he could force himself to take; but that and the stimulant wonder-

fully revived him, and with slow and feeble steps the pair commenced the return journey.

"Are you afraid of pursuit?" asked Athanasia, when half way through the wood he stopped to rest.

"I am," he answered. "But they did not bring me this way, so they may take the other, for I must have been missed ere now. My great terror is that savage bloodhound. He would track us down like death."

Athanasia shuddered. "I think they would not dare," was all the consolation she could offer. "But we must not linger. Oh, that some of the strong men who are searching for you were here to help us. Oh, for Aubrey Seaton's stalwart arm!"

Slowly, painfully they advanced upon their way, gaining courage, however, when they found themselves on the heath, and still unpursued. They kept clear of the Tower, judging that Newcomb and his fellows, if they did pursue before morning, would probably go thither. At one point of their course they caught a glimpse of the building, and they both thought that lights were glancing from the windows. And both said tremblingly, "*They are there!*"

After that, they pressed forward to the park, within which they would be comparatively safe. But they advanced more and more tardily, for Fabian's strength was almost gone. He leaned heavily on Athanasia, who could scarcely stand under his weight. "Bear on, bear on, dear Fabian! for the love of God bear on a few minutes longer, till we are within sight of the Hall. Then I will dare to leave you and summon help." And Fabian tried his utmost; he took a few steps more quickly, and then he stopped, gasped, and reeled. But for Athanasia's arms he would have fallen. She could not support him; she could only lay him gently on the ground and think what she ought to do next. In his exhausted state she could scarcely hope he would recover consciousness and power in that place. To her terror she heard footsteps behind her. Were they coming then? Had all their anguish and striving been in vain? "Oh, my God, forbid it!" she cried aloud. "Send help to the helpless and forsaken."

Her prayer was heard. It was no grim pursuer on their track, but the Methodist gardener, William Rigg, who had been sent by Edith and Mrs. Clifford to obtain, if possible, tidings of Mrs. Darcy.

"Gang ye t' hoose, misthress," said Rigg, when he had tried in vain to lift the prostrate burden. "My auld stiff airms canna lift a burdly chap like Muster Fabian. An' t' enemy shanna touch him while I'm here to do battle, wi' t' Lord o' Righteousness for my defence." And, as if on wings, Athanasia sped to the Hall, and returned with more than the help required. In a very short time Fabian was safe with his friends in the bedroom which had been prepared two hours ago with such very faint hope of his requiring it.

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## CHAPTER XLIX.

### SAFE AT LAST.

"See'st thou the Eastern dawn?  
Hear'st thou in the red morn  
The angel's song?  
Oh, lift thy drooping head,  
'Thou who, in gloom and dread,  
Hast lain so long."

THE long quiet of Seatondale was indeed broken now. The news of Fabian's disappearance having spread with surprising rapidity all through the district, not only those who were summoned, but magistrates and officials from far and near made their way to the Hall, to inquire into particulars, and to consult as to what action should be taken. With the earliest daylight came Dr. Redmayne and Mr. James Musgrave; a little later, Mr. Threlkeld and Dr. Wilson arrived; and ere the morning was far upon its way, others who had heard the tidings hastened to ascertain particulars and to offer such counsel and suggestions as should seem expedient.

Aubrey and his men returned from St. Ulpha's in the grey dawn. They had knocked up Father Sullivan and his grim old housekeeper, and on demanding to speak with Father Fabian, had at once been admitted and allowed to search the wide, dreary house from garrets to coal cellars at their own will and pleasure. Mr. Newcomb and the Italians were nowhere to be seen, and Father Sullivan, who had been for many years painfully hard of hearing, was at this juncture so very deaf that he answered all questions put to him completely at cross purpose. A meek-faced young priest, however, contrived to make him understand what was required of him, and he at once courteously assured Aubrey that Father Fabian had come to his house of his own free will, and of his own free will had departed from it; that he had arrived in the company of Mr. Gerard Newcomb, Damiano, and several Italian gentlemen who had been entrusted with important Church despatches, but that he had gone away alone, while the others had taken advantage of the night tide to embark in their own *felucca*, for Ireland, as he imagined, but he was not sure. His infirmity hindered him often from receiving correct impressions, and at his great age he really could not burden himself with other people's concerns.

Then Aubrey addressed himself to the young priest, who stood by his superior with folded hands and downcast eyes; but he had no information to impart. He only knew that certain persons had arrived, and had gone away again, after less than twenty-four hours' sojourn, and he thought—nay! he was certain—that Father Fabian did say something about hastening to Rome on very important business.

This was all that could be learned, and it was far nearer the bare truth than Aubrey and his allies supposed. One thing was certain—Fabian had been there and was there no longer; and it was only loss of time to remain at St. Ulpha's. It was just possible that he had returned to Malham, but not at all likely, and so Aubrey took his way back to Seaton Hall, with a sad spirit and a very weary body, to find, as we know, that he for whom he sought so painfully was already safe in harbour.

I have said that all the magnates of the district, including

the Duke's steward, found their way to Seaton; but a full explanation of the evasion, or abduction, whichever it might be, no one could receive, for Fabian, who alone could tell the tale, remained for days and weeks between life and death, sometimes delirious, and sometimes in stupor, but always in such a state as to render the profoundest quiet imperative. Athanasia was ill herself, but she crawled every morning to her post beside the patient's bed, and remained till her fast failing strength compelled her to retire. Mrs. Jelfe and Edith found their hands full enough: the latter felt it the greatest comfort to keep Millicent with her. As for Aubrey, as time passed on, and the invalid made little or no progress, he found that his presence was required at Southerleigh, and thither he repaired, leaving his sister as Edith's companion and helper. It was the middle of February before he returned to Seaton, and then it was in obedience to Millicent's summons, for Fabian was drawing nigh to death.

All through those weary wintry weeks he seemed fighting with the enemy, beneath whose mighty arm he must at last succumb; doctors and nurses alike declared that he must have had the soundest constitution; and Dr. Wilson remarked, "Whoever was to blame in that journey to St. Ulpha's, the man is practically *murdered*! With such stamina, he ought to have lived to eighty! He is worn out full thirty years too soon."

The Christmas snow lay long and thickly on the ground that winter, and the cold was intense. With much difficulty Dr. Redmayne and Mr. Clifford managed to reach Malham Tower, which they found silent and deserted, though some person or persons had evidently been there since it was evacuated on the 26th of December. They put seals on some of the doors, and on certain *escritoirs* and cabinets, according to Mrs. Darcy's directions, and then once more the grim old fortalice was locked up, and given over to its primitive, voiceless, fireless desolation. Certain properties were of course removed, but chiefly those which belonged to Athanasia. As for the costly Communion-plate, it was gone—no one could guess whither; and when Dr. Redmayne talked angrily of setting the police on the track of the thieves, Athanasia begged

him earnestly to do nothing of the kind. "Let it go," she said; "it is not really stolen; nay! those who have it are probably its true legal possessors. Fabian was only the nominal owner of many of the Malham valuables. Depend upon it, that Communion-plate is safe in London, in lawful custody, or else beyond the seas; at any rate it is where no police can ever find it, neither if found could it be claimed by any one here. The less said about it the better. It's of no use making an *esclandre*."

And after the first natural ebullitions, Dr. Redmayne was content to let it be even as Athanasia desired. It was impossible to be turbulent and restless with that pale presence of death in the house. To look at Fabian quieted the good doctor and disarmed the hostility he had begun to cherish against the Jesuit! the traitor! the base impostor! the pseudo-Anglo cleric, who had brought nothing but disgrace to the cause he had assumed to serve. In the presence of the deathly angel hovering about them, all were softened and filled with the heavenly spirit of forgiveness.

"No! one can't be hard-hearted *now*!" said Mrs. Jeliffe to Mr. Viner, when they were having their regular evening confabulation; "and I am sure I was as set against him as I well could be, for I knew in my own mind that he was not what he pretended to be, and I would have moved heaven and earth to get him sent to the right-about, only a very little while ago. But, you see, God is wiser than we poor rash creatures. He lets things work—and work—and work—quite naturally, it seems, and then when the time is come the right ends are answered. We make a fuss: *He don't*! Oh, dear me! Mr. Viner, what a deal of patience the Lord has! If he was half as hasty with any of us, even the best, as we are with one another, where should we be? No! I can't be angry with poor Mr. Fabian any longer. He has paid a big price, I fancy, for the high post he held, a bitter penalty for all his misdeeds, and now it is all over! He will never get up off that bed upstairs to do either good or evil any more. He's got his dismissal, and he is going fast. The Lord have mercy on his poor soul!"

"Amen!" said the butler, devoutly. "And He will,

Mrs. Jeliffe—*He will !* There is no doubt about it. Why, the other night, when I was sitting in his room, while both the nurses and Mrs. Darcy were away, I heard him praying, and not to any saints nor angels neither, but to *Jesus Christ Himself !* And you know what *He* says, Mrs. Jeliffe ? ‘Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.’ *He* won’t break the bruised reed, will *He* ? ”

“But was he sensible ? Even when he is not delirious he wanders so ! ”

“He was pretty sensible just then, I guess, though he did seem like one talking in a dream. But he would not pray to Christ unless he believed in Him, you know ; anyhow, it showed his hope was of the safe sort, didn’t it ? Oh ! you should have heard him say, just above his breath, but so fervent-like, with his poor weak hands clasped, and his eyes looking right up to the top of the bed, ‘Lord Jesus ! *Thou* art my hope ! I cast my soul on Thee—on *Thee alone.*’ ”

“Bless us ! did he now ? ” said Mrs. Jeliffe, wiping tears away. “Then we may be sure he’s all right, and God will forgive him, and take him to Himself, and it won’t be long first.”

No ; it was not long. Fabian’s sins and sorrows were almost ended. As he grew weaker, but more collected in his mind, the nurses were frequently dismissed, while the ladies of the family watched the invalid. One evening Edith alone sat with him, and she was behind the curtain, so that he probably believed himself unattended. He was talking gently to himself, as he often did now, or rather he was talking to God, bewailing his sins, and pleading the promises of the Gospel. She heard him murmur, “I was blinded, O Lord ! blinded ! I thought to serve *Thee* by lying and treachery. Thou knowest I did ! Forgive me ! Forgive me ! For Thy mercy’s sake in Thy loving-kindness blot out *all* my transgressions. I have wasted my life, Lord ; wasted the gifts Thou gavest me. I had health, and vigour, and genius, and learning, and fine tastes, and affluence, and position, and I—I gave them to Thy rival, Thy enemy—the Moloch who claims human lives and human souls. And for many a year I thought I rendered all to Thee ! That Thou knowest too, O Lord !

Oh, if in some other life I may serve only Thee, *only Thee*. Blessed be Thy holy Name, service does not end here on this side the grave. They who love Thee shall serve Thee eternally. We know not how or where, but it surely will be so in the unknown worlds, Father of Love and Light!"

And then all was silence, and in the half darkness that surrounded her Edith slid quietly to her knees, and prayed earnestly for him whose hours on earth were numbered. She had from the first felt an infinite compassion for this erring man, who had only been true to the false creed in which he had been trained, and which he had learned to receive as the very truth of God. She could not but blame the system far more than its devotee; it was Rome, not the Romanist, from which she only shrank. Very fervent were her prayers that Christ's Spirit might indeed guide the repentant sinner into all truth, and be with him through the gloomy valley the shadows and mists of which had already gathered round him.

Suddenly she heard her own name, for he began, after awhile, to speak again, and more distinctly and connectedly than before. She listened in profound astonishment, hardly believing the evidence of her own senses, as she heard him saying, "No; that was no sin. It was not God's law, but man's, that forbade me to love and wed according to His holy ordinance. It was no sin to love you, my darling Edith! It came upon me like a doom. And it does not matter now; she will never know how my poor heart beat and failed in her sweet presence. I think she and Aubrey love each other. God bless them both, and make them a happy, loving, wedded pair. They are worthy of each other. And I can see her from day to day as she moves about me, and even tends me with her own kind, gentle hand. God bless you, my darling, a thousand, thousand times! You could never have been to me more than you are; but you could never have been less, and now it is very sweet so to die, seeing your dear face, and hearing your soft voice to the very last. It is very merciful of God to grant me so much, to let me die here with friends about my bed, and she whom I love like a ministering angel at my side."

Edith could bear no more. She retreated to the dress-



ing-room, where she was glad to relieve her emotions by a burst of weeping. And here she was found by Athanasia, who, frightened at the sight of her tears, exclaimed, "Oh, is he worse? Is he *gone*?" For Dr. Wilson had told them that he might slip away with very little notice.

"No, no!" replied Edith. "He is about the same, I think—still slowly sinking."

"Then why are you weeping, my dear?"

"Do not ask me, please. He said something that touched my very heart; I could not repeat it."

"He said that he loved you? Was not that it, my dear child?"

"Oh, yes. But why do you ask that? Did you know?"

"Yes; I knew it weeks, months ago! I knew it; no one else has even guessed it. But he hid nothing from me latterly. We have been son and mother in all but blood. Oh, it is best that he should be taken from this troublesome world! He has sinned deeply, but he has suffered much. And he has suffered in so many ways—from the base ingratitude of those whom he served at his soul's peril; from the cruel malice of his enemies; from treachery and unkindness and spiteful misconstruction of motives; from *remorse*—such remorse, Edith, as you cannot even picture to yourself!—such utter abasement of spirit, such agonies of a tardily-awakened conscience! and from his unhappy love, which, however, cannot be the bitterest drop in the bitter cup he has had to drain, for it was pure and unmixed with all that has darkened his life and brought him to the grave in the summer of his years."

"Oh, why did he love me?—he saw so little of me till he came and lay down upon that bed to die!"

"Can we account for love's mysterious impulses? Not that I ever truly loved myself; the mother's love I have for *him* is the strongest, purest affection I have ever known. But ask yourself; you ought to know, unless I am greatly deceived. Why do you love Aubrey Seaton? Don't blush, dear child, there is nothing to be ashamed of. Such love as yours is holy, and blessed by God. I trust, and Fabian trusts, that He, the good God, will grant to you and Aubrey a long and happy life together."

Only, dear, when in years to come you are a thrice happy wife, with merry children and all sweet sacred home joys about you, when your heart is full with praise and thanksgiving for your most blessed lot, then give one kind and tender thought to him who loved you in vain. Oh, child, you cannot guess what love is like to a man of his deep, strong nature; and to a man of middle age, who has never before even faintly loved mortal woman. Think kindly of him, and stay with him till the last—it will not be long now. When does Mr. Seaton arrive?"

"To-morrow; Millicent wrote yesterday. Aubrey will not delay an hour; but it is a long, weary journey from Southerleigh. It is even possible that he may come to-night."

And Edith was right. Aubrey did come, though he had to take the dangerous over-sands route, having missed the last train that stopped at Farleton or Keirmouth. But he was amply repaid for the risk and the toil when he saw the smile of infinite content that spread itself over Fabian's white, sunken face, as he presented himself at the bedside.

He clasped Aubrey's hand in silence, then he closed his eyes and whispered, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace."

A few more hours, another day yet remained, and Fabian's mind was at last quite clear and his memory unclouded. He talked a good deal, and did not seem exhausted; he even said he felt *rested*, and his friends began to wonder whether he might not yet weather the storm, and recover health and strength. A wild hope seized upon Athanasia, though it lasted only an hour or two; a hope that the crisis was past, and restoration possible. "And then," she said to Edith, "we will gather together what little substance we both have, and Aubrey Seaton will be sure to help us, and we will go away, far away to the great wilds of the Western World, and do missionary work there to our lives' end."

But it was not to be, and as the day wore on Athanasia's brief vision faded. Fabian told Aubrey that he wished no one to be blamed concerning that fatal journey to St. Ulpha's. "For," said he, "I went thither of my

own free will; I was summoned and I obeyed; I was not going to add to the sin and shame that overwhelmed me. There was my oath—a succession of oaths—how awful, how binding such oaths are, *you* know, Aubrey! I was not made in my youthful ignorance and incredulity to swear allegiance to I knew not what, as you were, my son! I registered my vows again and again, and in the fullest possession of manhood's faculties; I could not break them, where the keeping of them entailed suffering only on myself. They found out my retreat, where poor Athanasia vainly hoped to conceal me from their malice, and they bade me in virtue of my oath, and in obedience to a signature and a seal I well knew, to accompany them. But at St. Ulpha's I heard something that filled me with direst apprehension. I had promised to appear as cited, in the second week of January, and I thought I might at least choose my own time for yielding up my liberty and probably my life. Also, I yearned to see you and—and—*others*, once more; I wanted a few more halcyon hours of calm before I launched out into that troubled sea, on whose wild waters I knew full well that I must suffer shipwreck. And so, when they left me to myself, trusting, perhaps, to the apathetic resignation with which I had followed them, I, knowing well the ways of the house, easily escaped, and the rest I need not tell. Let no one be blamed! I dug a pit and fell into it myself. I was but caught in my own snare. I did but reap that which I had sown. Now, God calls me; He quits me of my oath to men, and summons me to appear before His own dread judgment-seat."

"And you do not fear to meet *Him*?"

"No! no! I take the free pardon offered to the worst of sinners who repent. I mourn my wasted life, my perverted gifts, but I shall serve Him yet, I humbly trust."

"Surely!" said Aubrey. "It would be sad indeed did service end with this brief, maimed life of ours, which is but a drop to the wide ocean. One cannot love God, and not do His work, either here or in the unknown worlds to come."

And so they talked on, for Fabian had much to say to

the pupil of old time, and to the faithful friend of the fast fleeting present. Aubrey told him that Edith and he were betrothed, but that they had agreed to say nothing about it for several months to come. "We could not intrude our happiness on so much sorrow," he said. "We are not boy and girl; we can wait a more fitting season." And Fabian blessed them both, and said it gave him great joy to know that the two who had loved so long and so faithfully understood each other at last.

Later in the day came Mr. Clifford. He was anxious that Fabian should profess himself a Protestant. But Fabian replied, "No! no! There is plenty of good in my poor old Church; it is too late to call myself what you wish. Nay, don't be distressed, it is well with me; Christ is with me; He has spoken pardon and peace. I am past all creeds—all visible churches, now!"

And then Mr. Clifford asked if he would not wish to receive the Holy Communion; adding that he might, if he chose, consecrate the elements himself. But Fabian only smiled. "No, no," he answered again, "I am past sacraments and creeds; I don't want the type any longer; I am on the brink of grasping the reality. I consecrate the bread and wine! No man can consecrate it, as you intend the term. I see it all now, for dying eyes see clearly; the bread is always bread, the wine is always wine! and we eat and drink in memory of Christ's love and to show forth His death *till He come!* that is all. Believe me, Clifford, neither in your Church nor in ours is there any such thing as priestly consecration. No, I don't want the memorial when I have *Himself*. Yes, *HIMSELF*—for the veil is lifting."

Those were almost Fabian's last words. As the evening shadows fell, a gradual stupor stole over him, and he seemed to sleep. And through the long night he lay calm and peaceful as a slumbering child in its mother's arms.

"He will go with the dawn," said the nurses.

"His life will set with the morning star," said Athanasia; "he is only waiting for the new day."

And so it came to pass, that when the eastern heavens grew rosy red on the gleaming mountain-tops; when the glassy mere glowed with their crimson reflection; when

the birds began their earliest hymn of praise; when the morning-star hid itself in "heaven's own light," the signal of dismission came. Fabian opened his eyes, and saw Aubrey and Edith standing beside him. Then he whispered, "I thank Thee, O my God! To Thee, O Lord Christ, my strength and my Redeemer, I yield my spirit."

And then it was all over. Without a sigh or a struggle, Fabian went to God, and Aubrey, as he closed the rayless eyes, said with broken voice, "*So He giveth His beloved sleep.*"

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## CHAPTER L.

### THE PROTESTANT HEIR.

ONCE more there was peace at quiet Seatondale. Fabian was buried in the little graveyard of the ancient chapelry. Aubrey went home to Southerleigh; and Millicent, after a few weeks' prolonged stay with Edith, followed him. The Cliffords pursued the even tenor of their way; at the Hall things went on very much in their usual course; and the dalespeople talked less and less about the unhappy monk of Malham Tower.

Aubrey and Edith had not parted, however, without discussing their future plans. Of course, Aubrey had at once stepped into the vacant guardianship, and so many little difficulties were smoothed away. It was not necessary that the heiress should spend the whole of her minority at Seaton Hall—the General himself had said as much when, a few hours before his death, he had spoken to Edith concerning the welfare of his child. Edith and Beatrice were never to be parted while the latter needed protection and companionship; but it was not General Seaton's desire that Edith should devote herself to the little girl so as to interfere with her own happiness. He

required no painful sacrifice of Edith's own life and aims, and therefore he distinctly observed, that if need were, Beatrice might live with Edith, and that it was not binding upon Edith to live continually with Beatrice.

The engagement between Aubrey and Edith was known to several persons, and suspected by many more; but it was not formally announced, and nothing was settled as to the period of their marriage. But Aubrey and Millicent were to come back to the North in the autumn, and then all definite arrangements would be concluded.

Aubrey's and Millicent's perversion was a terrible shock, at first, to poor old Father Eustace; and the Abbess aunt, and the cloistered sisters by turns, raved and wept, and bemoaned the horrible calamity which had befallen their ancient house; and it was the last drop in the bitter cup of these sorrowful ladies, that the unhappy young man had openly professed himself a Dissenter! "If he had only embraced *Anglicanism*," said the Mother Superior of St. Ethelburga's, tearfully, "we might have hoped for his return to the true fold of Christ. The Church of England is constantly providing us with recruits, and will, by our Lady's help, provide more, as this queer little whim of Ritualism develops itself; but whoever heard of a Dissenter, as such, turning Catholic!"

"Poor deluded creatures!" said "Sister Clara,"—once known in the world as Miss Maude Seaton,—"there is indeed no hope for them, so firmly do they reject salvation, so closely do they cling to their own unhallowed faith. Still, if Aubrey could be prevailed upon to ally himself to that section of the English Church which prides itself on being 'High,' who knows what might happen? He drifted into Dissent through his wretched American associations; it was mere force of circumstances, I am convinced. Let him once profess himself of the Establishment, and there will be a chance!"

"A very poor chance," replied the Superior, shaking her veiled head. "Dissent, as the Bishop of Oscott assures me, is in itself of so damnable a nature, that he who voluntarily embraces it casts away his soul. Of course, they who are born and bred in this lowest form of heresy are greatly to be pitied, and they suffer for the sins of their

progenitors ; but they who, with their eyes open, turn to the abominations of Nonconformity, can expect no pity from man, and no mercy from the Almighty."

"Yet, after all, they are only *Protestants!*" said Sister Clara; "and I cannot see that it much matters what sort of Protestant a person is. You are either in the true fold, or out of it. These Anglicans, unreconciled as they are to our Holy Church, are as much without the fold as those miserable Dissenters. Heresy is heresy, whatever be its guise."

"True, quite true ! The Anglo-Catholics, as they stupidly call themselves, are actually no better off than the Dissenters, whom they despise. They are like children who play at being grown-up people till they fancy they really are what they pretend to be. Fools ! to think that by copying the outward form, and adopting *portions* of our creed, they make themselves Catholics ! Till they submit themselves, body and soul, to Rome, they are just where the Dissenters are, only it does not answer our purpose to tell them so ! And of course, if the so-called Church of England be—as she undoubtedly is, for all her pretensions, *apostate*, Dissent is doubly apostate. The advanced Oxford school stand but a little way from the portals of salvation—a step or two, and the threshold is passed. But the Evangelicals and the Dissenters are so far off, that they cannot see the gate, and will not even turn their faces towards it."

All sorts of prayers to all sorts of saints and saintesses were doubtless offered by Aubrey's pious relatives ; and Sister Ursula observed a solemn *neuvaine* entirely on his account. But the dead men and women, to whom these poor ladies ignorantly appealed with the very best intentions, were deaf to their entreaties, for to this day Aubrey Seaton is an uncompromising Protestant and a staunch Dissenter, and Millicent has married into what Dr. Redmayne calls "a perversely Nonconformist connection."

Vance was half-shocked and half-triumphant at his master's "perversion," which was publicly announced on his first return to Southerleigh. He was grieved that Seaton of Southerleigh should fall from the faith, and be pointed at as a heretic, "a double-dyed heretic,"—for

Vance, like his betters, held Nonconformity to be the lowest deep of Protestantism ! He was delighted to find that his dreams, after all, *meant something*, and to force Father Eustace to acknowledge that the visions of his sleep were fully accomplished when Mr. Seaton swept away candlesticks, censers, crosses, and altar-cloths, and reduced the private chapel of his ancestors to a mere unadorned conventicle.

The summer sped away, and already the first tints of autumn were touching the lovely landscape about Seaton-dale. "The berries on the mountain-ash are turning quite red, Edith," said little Beatrice, one bright September day, as she shut up her books, and prepared to run out into the garden with her little dog Flossy ; "and that tells that Cousin Aubrey will soon be here, for he promised to come before the Michaelmas daisies, you know."

"Do you want to see Mr. Seaton ?" asked Edith, with a happy smile on her own rosy lips, and a happier light in her deep lustrous eyes, for she had heard from Aubrey that very morning, and he had said that he was coming in two days from that time.

"Want him ?" said the child ; "of course I do ! He is my cousin, and I like him—yes, I like him very much. He is so kind, and he makes such fun ; and I mean to ask him to get me a peacock. When I asked you, you said it must be left till Cousin Aubrey came. But I don't care for him as I did for Uncle Fabian ! There never was anybody like poor Uncle Fabian, and never will be. Why do people call him *Father* Fabian now ? He was not a father, you know ? He never had a little boy or a little girl of his own—for I asked him ! It is as silly as if I called you Mother Edith !"

And the child, without waiting for a rejoinder, summoned her dog, and scampered away with him to the broad, grassy terraces, where she generally enjoyed her games with her four-footed playmate, in sight of the windows of Edith's own sitting-room. Beatrice was growing up a bright, loving little thing ; she was docile as a rule, and easily influenced, generally amiable, though not deficient in spirit, and she possessed far more than average abilities. She learned so fast that Edith was sometimes



compelled to check the too rapid progress of her pupil. But Mademoiselle's teaching had borne fruit! Beatrice was not truthful, and she was sadly apt to resort to under-hand ways when she wished to enjoy contraband pleasures. She would scheme and intrigue in order to conceal her naughtiness. It was a great pain to Edith that she could not trust her beloved charge, and that, notwithstanding much apparent repentance, she returned again and again to the petty deceptions, which seemed in her almost like natural instincts. Edith was greatly exercised in her mind on this point, and she determined to talk to Aubrey on the subject very seriously.

That same evening she was going into the village, and Beatrice wished to accompany her. The German maid whom Edith had lately secured as the child's personal attendant went with them, because Edith intended paying a visit in a cottage where she would rather not take Beatrice. This cottage was not far from the upper end of the mere, and Edith, who only meant to stay a few minutes, desired the little girl to walk up and down the broad road which skirted the rushy margin of the lake, and at the same time gave strict injunctions to Lenchen that she should not leave the side of her young lady.

Now Beatrice knew that at a certain spot, just beyond the turn of the road, was a little bay, wherein grew some yellow water-lilies, which she particularly desired to gather for herself. It was a child's perverse whim, nothing more. She could have had any quantity of lilies gathered for her. She had only to signify her wish and have it gratified; but that was not enough. Her paramount desire just then was to get them for herself, as the village children did. She had not asked Edith if she might do so, for she knew pretty well that the request would be denied, or if not denied that permission would be so partially accorded that all sense of adventure would be lost. So, with the fatal diplomacy which she so often practised, she kept utter silence on the subject of the flowers, never even mentioning them in common conversation. Edith could not even guess what was working in her mind.

No sooner had her governess gone out of earshot than

Beatrice commenced operations. This was an opportunity which might never recur, and it behoved her to make the best of it. "Lenchen," she said, addressing her maid, "come here, and I will show you real forget-me-nots, such as you say grow in Germany. This way; it is not five yards."

"But," argued Lenchen, who was trustworthy, "we must not leave this path. Miss Armstrong said we must remain in it till she returned. She will let you show me the forget-me-nots when she comes back; she is always so complacent, this good Miss Armstrong."

"Nonsense, Lenchen!" retorted the child. "It is all one path, only it turns just a little. If you will not come, I shall set off alone, and you will be scolded for letting me go without you." And with no more ado, seeing Lenchen's face still inflexible, she set off at a sharp run, and poor Lenchen had no course left but run after her wilful little mistress. She could not, however, overtake her. Beatrice was light and nimble; Lenchen slow, and stout for her years. The small glassy inlet where the yellow lilies grew was reached several minutes before the girl had any chance of overtaking the naughty child. Excited by the pursuit, Beatrice darted eagerly forward, and swinging herself on to the low hanging bough of a willow which drooped over the water, began to pull at the tough elastic stalks of the lilies.

"Oh! come back, come back, dear Mademoiselle!" shrieked the terrified attendant; "you will be drowned, and then what will Miss Armstrong say?"

"I cannot tell," laughed the daring child, as she manoeuvred herself further on, lest Lenchen's extended hands should reach her. "Don't touch me, or I *shall* fall into the water, and it will be all your fault if I am drowned. I am safe enough, and the water is not deep. I could touch the bottom."

"Come back! Come back, *do!*" cried poor distressed Lenchen. "Oh, Mademoiselle, the water is quite deep enough to drown you! Come back, I implore you. Take my hand to steady yourself, and be careful, that bough might snap."

"In a minute," said Beatrice, nonchalantly. "I see a beautiful white lily, and I must have that. This willow bough has grown here on purpose for me. What a nice swing it makes; and I like to dangle my feet just above the water. Oh, Lenchen, I see millions of little fishes!"

Lenchen was preparing to wade into the water, and seize upon the culprit, when Beatrice, perceiving her intention, advanced several inches, and put out her hand to clutch the coveted water-lily, which was much further from her than she had supposed. She missed, and tried again, and in the strain overbalanced herself. Before Lenchen could speak or stir, the child was in the water, which was at least four feet deep, and the bank rapidly shelving. She disappeared instantly; there was one plunge, and then all was still; the eddying circles spread upon the bosom of the glassy lake, and no one could have guessed what the cool, translucent waves enfolded.

Lenchen's wild shriek brought to her aid the shepherd—Dolly's husband—who was going home from his daily work. He only half comprehended the terror-stricken girl, for in her extremity she forgot her English, and poured forth a torrent of German, to which the man listened in amazement. He understood that some one had fallen into the water, but that it was the little lady of Seatondale whom he was implored to save he never guessed. He could not swim, but, throwing off his frock, he waded in as far as he could go, asking anxiously whereabouts the drowning person had sunk. A minute more, and, at some distance from the place where she had fallen in, and quite in deep water, the child rose to the surface. And then the shepherd strained every nerve to reach her. At the risk of his own life he struggled on, with the water touching his lips: at the next step he would have been overhead. It was all in vain; there was a slight current running through the mere, from end to end, and it caught the child's slight form, and drifted it into the deepest water. When, a minute afterwards, Edith came up, little Beatrice was beyond all human aid. A full hour elapsed before the lifeless body was recovered, far too late for the

remedies, which were at once applied, to take effect. All that could be done was done, and Edith and Mrs. Clifford persevered long after they were assured that the child was really dead. The child-heiress of Seatondale had left her rich inheritance, and he who was once called the Popish heir reigned in her stead. Seatondale and Southerleigh were at last united.

And once more that gloomy vault under the grand old Priory Church at Chalfonts opened to receive the last of the true Seatondale Seatons; and once more Dr. Redmayne read the solemn funeral service of his Church within the low-browed crypt, where so many of the Seatons of past times mouldered in slow decay. That vault would be opened nevermore; for now the last of its lawful tenants was there at rest.

And so it came to pass that Aubrey arrived at Seaton Hall as its lord and master. The goodly heritage which had passed from him more than seven years before was now his own; but he would joyfully have surrendered his just claim could he have brought back his hapless little cousin to her ancestral home. It seemed as if some deep shadow always rested on fair Seatondale whenever he approached it. Each time he had journeyed thither it was to attend a funeral. The gentle Mary Seaton; the brave old General; poor repentant Fabian; and now the once merry, gladsome child, whose deceit and disobedience had cost her her life! It was very sad; it was like a painful dream; and when the young master of Seaton sat in his uncle's place, on the evening of the little girl's funeral day, he could scarcely believe in the reality of present circumstances. It seemed not many days since he had heard in the misty spring morning, the knell that told him that the baby-heiress was motherless! It seemed only a little while ago that he—a mere boy in mind and purpose, though a man in years—had sat opposite Fabian at that very table, and loathed himself for the part he had taken in the shameful fraud practised on the unsuspecting General. Even now it was a bitter humiliation to think how he had yielded his truth and honour at a mortal man's command.

Edith was with the Cliffords; she was so ill that she

needed her friend's tenderest sympathy and most careful nursing. Mrs. Jeliffe undertook the charge of the younger children, and so room was found for the future mistress of the Hall at Priests' Croft, notwithstanding its limited accommodation. No one could possibly be blamed; the poor child herself had rushed upon her fate. And yet Edith could not but deplore the visit she had paid on that fatal evening; and Lenchen, who had done her best, reproached herself that she had not succeeded in catching the runaway before the dangerous spot was reached. It was one of those painful cases in which a good deal of unnecessary self-torture must be endured; and it was many a day before Edith ventured to take the road leading to that fairy-like little bay, where grew the graceful water-lilies which had lured her lost darling to her doom.

After awhile, she went to pay a visit to Lady Sophia Saville, who was delighted to receive as her honoured guest the lady-elect of Seatondale. She had never cared to show much kindness to Miss Armstrong, the governess; but the future Mrs. Seaton was worthy of every consideration. For such is much the way of the world—even of that section of it which professes Christianity. It is true of all ranks and conditions, that "*men will praise thee when thou doest well unto thyself!*" And sad experience teaches us that, in temporalities at least, "nothing succeeds like success!"

And so another winter passed away; the snow whitened the fells of Seatondale once more, and lay pure and dazzling in the cold sunshine, on the lonely mountain-tops. And silence and solitude reigned at deserted Malham Tower. Aubrey visited Edith under the protection of her noble kinswoman several times during that long, weary winter, and he wrote to her almost daily; but it was late in the spring before she could bear to think of returning to Seaton Hall as its mistress. "No mourning will bring the poor little thing back again," said Lady Sophia, one lovely April day, "and you have no right to keep Aubrey in suspense. If you love him, marry him! It is just eight years since you began to care for each other; and youth does not last for ever, remember. If

you don't care very much, why you had better leave him alone; only say so, and do not, I beseech you, play the coquette. Ah! I thought that would make you fire up, young lady! You *do* care—*very much*?—I thought so! Very well, we will go up to town early next week, and see about your things, and Aubrey will attend to the settlements at once. Mr. Threlkeld has had instructions, I cannot say how long! Aubrey told me so himself.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Years have passed since Aubrey and Edith became husband and wife, and a fine, stalwart youth, who is much such another as his father was when he rode over Garth Head for the first time in the pleasant spring evening, and beheld the goodly heritage of Seatondale, is now the Protestant Heir. And young Aubrey has brothers and sisters, for Edith is the joyful mother of four fine boys, and three fair girls. Mrs. Darcy lives still in one of the park-lodges, and is always delighted when “the family” come north for the summer months. One of the boys is named Fabian, and she pets him so much that his parents are half afraid of his being spoiled when he is with her. True to her resolve, she worships with the Primitive Methodists, yet, curiously enough, observes in a certain fashion some of the fasts and festivals of the Church she has forsaken. She is an old woman now—very old, indeed; but she is still vigorous and clear-minded, and likes nothing better than to walk over to Malham on a quiet summer evening, and enter the Tower, of which she keeps the key, and muse, not quite sadly, on the days that are gone. The Cliffords are still at Priests’ Croft, and Aubrey Seaton, though a staunch Nonconformist, has built them a new house, and added considerably to Mr. Clifford’s income as perpetual curate of Seatondale. And the last that was heard of Mademoiselle Annette is, that she was taken up on suspicion of theft, but discharged for want of legal evidence. As for Gerard Newcomb and the traitor Damiano, no one has heard of them since they quitted the Dominican Convent at St. Ulpha’s. And Millicent is happily married, and so are Agnes Clifford and her sister Phemie.

And here ends the chronicle of Father Fabian, the Monk of Malham Tower. If it do not point its own moral it is written in vain; nor can any words of the writer teach the lesson, or impress the warning, which she would thus faithfully convey.

THE END.

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